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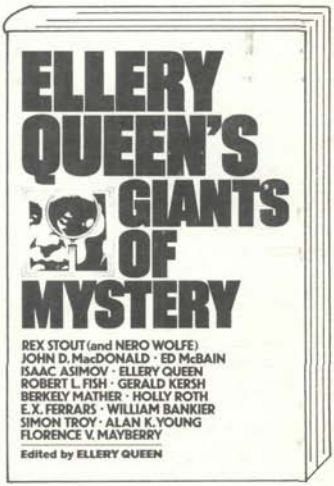
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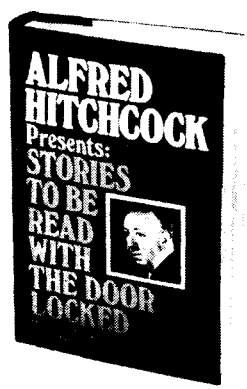

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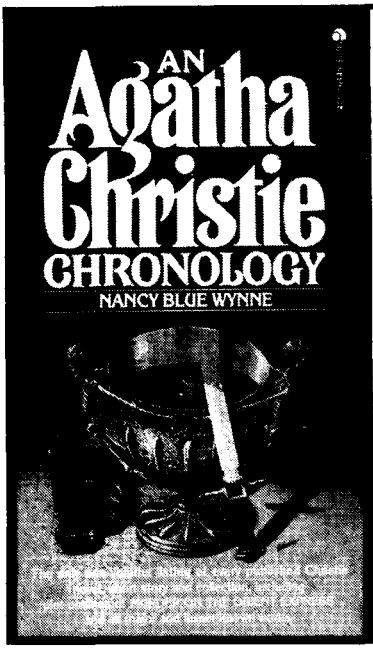

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A CASE OF SHOPLIFTING

by MICHAEL GILBERT

Mrs. Prior had had her eye on the gray-haired woman ever since she came into the shop. Not that there was anything obviously suspicious about her. Fiftyish, Mrs. Prior guessed. Quite expensively dressed and carrying an oversized shopping bag. It was something about her manner—the unobtrusive way she sidled into the shop, the quick look she cast around, a look which was not directed at the merchandise on the counters, but at the people.

Melluish & Sons was the most expensive of the three shops that Mrs. Prior had to watch, and the most difficult to guard, dealing as it did in small luxury goods for women. They had lost a lot of stuff in the past twelve months and were beginning to talk about installing closed-circuit television.

Was the gray-haired woman hanging about unnecessarily near the handbag counter? The attendant had turned her back to deal with another customer. A gloved hand flashed out. Mrs. Prior was too far off to see exactly what happened, but the gray-haired woman was now walking to the door. It was the moment of decision.

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When the woman had stepped out onto the pavement Mrs. Prior intercepted her. "Excuse me, madam," she said. "I wonder if you'd mind showing me what you have in that bag."

The standard reactions—shock, anxiety, an assumed bewilderment. "Oh! Who are you? Why should I?"

"I am a member of the shop's security staff," said Mrs. Prior. "If I have made a mistake, I am quite prepared to apologize."

But no apology was going to be needed. Mrs. Prior was sure of that.

Which brought Chief Inspector Petrella into the story. He listened to what Mrs. Prior had to say, and to the comments of Mr. Jacklin, the Managing Director of Melluish & Sons, and to the few incoherent remarks made by the gray-haired woman.

"We can't force you to identify yourself," said Petrella. "But you realize that if you refuse to give us your name and address we shall have to detain you until someone does identify you."

"Detain me? You mean in prison?"

"You will be placed in charge of a woman police officer."

"Oh!"

Petrella said, in his kindest voice, "This isn't doing you any good, madam. Sooner or later we shall find out who you are. Someone will miss you and begin to make inquiries." He tried a long shot. "When your husband gets home from work—"

The word 'husband' proved to be the key. The woman broke down in a fit of gulping sobs. When she could speak she said, "I'm Mrs. Kent-Smith. I live at Mapledurham Mansions."

"Mrs. Kent-Smith, eh?" said Sergeant Gwilliam when she had been charged and sent home in a police car, the driver having been given instructions to bring her straight back to the police station if there was any doubt about her being who she said she was or living where she said she did. "Her old man's not going to like this. He's in business—house property and things like that."

Mr. Kent-Smith arrived just when Petrella was ready to go out to lunch. He was a man in his middle fifties, a little paunchy, but alert enough and with a useful pair of shoulders on him. Petrella had been making inquiries and knew he had to deal with a formidable man. Rumor said he had been a Sergeant Major in the R.A.S.C.

In the years since the war Mr. Kent-Smith had prospered. Starting with a bombed site at the Elephant and Castle and then having some luck with a war-damage claim, he had built up a

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chain of shops, offices, and flats that were now part of a honeycomb of interlocking companies which he controlled.

"I'd like to know what all this is about," he said. "I couldn't get much out of my wife."

The former Sergeant Major was buried, deep down under layers of the self-made tycoon. But the Sergeant Major was still there, thought Petrella.

He said, picking his words carefully, "A woman, who identified herself as your wife, was detected leaving Melluish and Sons this morning with one of their crocodile-skin handbags"—Petrella unlocked the drawer of his desk and took it out—"which there was no record of her having paid for. Her explanation was that she had put it into her shopping bag, meaning to pay for it, and had forgotten to do so."

Mr. Kent-Smith looked at the handbag. He said, "Silly thing to do. She could easily have bought it if she'd wanted it. Eighteen pounds, Jacklin said. I understand from Jacklin that if I pay for it, he's prepared to forget the incident."

"If he had said that before she was charged," said Petrella, "it might have saved us all a lot of trouble."

"Can't you withdraw the charge?"

"We could decide not to proceed with it. But we'd only do that if there was insufficient evidence. That's not the case here. Far from it."

"Who decides on these matters?"

"In this case, I do."

"I see."

Mr. Kent-Smith was weighing Petrella in the thoughtful way a boxer might weigh his adversary in the ring. He said, "I'd better explain why this means so much to me. In the ordinary way I think I'd let it go. It's a first offense, so I assume it would mean only a fine. Which would teach my wife a lesson. But I can't chance it. Not at this moment. I don't know if you follow the financial press, Inspector?"

"I don't have much time for that sort of thing."

"Well, I'm on the point of my first public flotation—a public offering of stock. You'll see the advertisement in the papers next week. Or you would have."

"You mean this will stop it?"

"It will kill it. Stone-dead. The whole issue of company stock depends on my good name. It's me they're buying. If my wife's up

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on a charge of shoplifting, I might just as well call the whole thing off."

Petrella started to say something, but Mr. Kent-Smith raised his hand to stop him. "Let me finish. Shares in my holding company stand right now at a nominal one pound each. They're mostly held by me and my friends. When we get a market quotation they'll go to three pounds. I can let you have five thousand shares at par. There's nothing illegal about it. Two pounds is the price at the moment. You could borrow the money from your bank."

"I've been offered bribes before," said Petrella to his wife that evening. "All policemen are. But I've never been offered ten thousand pounds."

"What did you say?"

"I said 'no'."

"Quite right," said his wife firmly.

"I'm trying hard to think so. Actually, I'm much sorrier for his wife than I am for him. I don't believe this is going to stop him. He might have to put off this flotation, or whatever it is, for six months. It'll be a nuisance, and it'll cost him more than the ten thousand he offered me. But he'll take it out of her. She's an odd woman. She came to see me before I left the station this evening. Do you know why?"

"To beg herself off the charge."

"On the contrary. She came to apologize."

"Apologize? For what?"

"For giving us all such a lot of trouble. She said she knew how overworked the police were."

"You must be joking."

"Then we had a long talk about it and about her husband. How he's so busy with his work he never gets in until ten or eleven o'clock at night and goes off first thing in the morning and she never really sees him."

"This is the first evening *you've* been in before nine," said Mrs. Petrella pointedly.

"And how he seems to be growing away from her."

"What were you supposed to do about it? You're a policeman, not a psychiatrist."

"And how sorry she is she never had any children. She blames herself for it."

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His wife thought about the tot asleep in his crib upstairs who was the center of her existence. She had nothing to say to that.

It was on the following morning that a worried Mr. Jacklin arrived at Patton Street Police Station. The Managing Director of Melluish & Sons had another man with him. He said, "Yesterday evening I thought I'd make a check of our stock of handbags. I was afraid we might have lost more than one."

"And had you?"

"No, we hadn't."

"That's all right then, isn't it?"

"I mean," said Mr. Jacklin slowly, *"that we hadn't even lost one."*

Petrella stared at him.

"Stock purchased, stock sold, stock remaining. The items balance exactly. That's when I began to wonder. Do you mind if I look at that handbag again?"

Petrella unlocked the drawer of his desk and got it out. Mr. Jacklin took out a magnifying glass, opened the handbag, turned back the silk lining, and peered into it. He said, "Just as I thought. This isn't one of ours. We mark them with a very small symbol. It's really just a few pinpricks." He said to the other man, "It's what we thought, Sam. This is one of yours, isn't it?"

The other man took over the magnifying glass and made a brief examination. "That's right," he said. "That's our shop mark. Carson and Begg. Mr. Jacklin thought it might be us. We're the only other store in the district that handles this particular line."

"And have you lost one?"

"Not that I know of," said the man. "But I can tell you who owned that one. I sold it myself three days ago. To Mrs. Kent-Smith. She buys a lot of stuff from us from time to time."

"And she paid for it?"

"Naturally."

"Then I suppose she'd better have it back," said Petrella weakly.

"And it won't be necessary to go on with the charge against her now," said Mr. Jacklin. "I'm glad about that. Mr. Kent-Smith's an important man in these parts, you understand."

Petrella said he understood perfectly.

"So," said Mr. Kent-Smith. "The whole thing was a damn boxup. My wife gets charged with stealing something which is her

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own property. She's dragged round to the police station like a common criminal. *And* taken home in a police car, so that all the neighbors can get an eyeful of it."

"If she'd given her name and some evidence of identity, none of that would have happened," said Petrella.

"Why should she? She hadn't done anything wrong."

"If she hadn't done anything wrong," said Petrella, "why did she tell us that story about putting the handbag into her shopping bag and forgetting to pay for it?"

"There's no mystery about that. She said it because she was scared. And who's going to blame her? Being dragged along to the police station and bullied by a crowd of louts who call themselves policemen and don't even take the trouble to check up whether something they say has been stolen has really been stolen before bringing charges. And if you think you've heard the end of this, Mr. Chief Inspector Petrella, you can damn well think again. I'm going straight to my solicitor."

"I seem to be in trouble with the law again," said Petrella sadly. "Last month it was libel, now it's false arrest."

"Never rains but it pours," said Superintendent Watterson. "I've been accused of a lot of things in my time—arson, fraud, perjury. I don't know that it ever ran to libel. You'd better warn our legal chaps."

"What I really dislike about these lawsuits," said Petrella, "is the way they go on for months and months."

Here, however, he was wrong. It was on the following morning that Mrs. Kent-Smith sailed into his office. She seemed to be in excellent spirits. She said, "I've good news for you, Inspector. My husband is dropping his complaint against you."

"That certainly is good news," said Petrella. "I wonder what made him change his mind."

"I did."

Petrella knew that this was the point at which he ought to stop asking questions, but the temptation was too great. He said, "I wonder if you'd mind my asking you. How did you manage it?"

Mrs. Kent-Smith giggled. She said, "I told him that if he didn't, I'd confess to three other cases of shoplifting. I gave him all the details and showed him the things."

She sounded as proud as a child displaying her birthday presents.

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"There was a little scarf from Simpson's—a pretty thing in pink and green. A powder compact from Greenway's—not expensive, and not really in good taste. And a cookbook from Simmond's."

"And *had* she stolen those things?" asked his wife.

"I'm afraid," said Petrella, "that at that point I lost my nerve. *I simply didn't dare ask her.* Luckily she changed the subject. She wanted my advice about some new curtains she had bought. She had the patterns with her. I'm not very clever about colors, so I just said I thought they were a little on the bright side. She said she thought so too and was going to change them."

"I see," said his wife.

"I don't know what you mean by that," said Petrella. "But if you mean that you can make some sense out of it, you're a lot cleverer than I am. Why on earth should she go through all that rigmarole of buying a handbag in one shop and pretending to steal it in another?"

"Simple. She wanted her husband to pay some attention to her."

Petrella thought about it and said, "It's plausible."

"It's obvious. Don't you remember that woman who set her house on fire because her husband didn't take enough notice of her?"

"If that's right," said Petrella, "why didn't she let him get on with his complaint against me?"

"That's easy too," said his wife. "You're the son she never had."

"Good God!" said Chief Inspector Petrella.

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a NEW short story by

JOYCE HARRINGTON

She wore a different color every day. One day she was all in pink—pink dress, pink shoes, pink handbag, pink scarf. The day before she was all in lavender. The next day all in red. Then brown. Green . . .

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BLUE MONDAY

by JOYCE HARRINGTON

She was dressed all in pink. As I boarded the bus behind her, I couldn't stop looking at her pink shoes. Up the high grimy steps they went. Cheap shoes. Flimsy sandals made to last for one summer, if that long. The feet inside them were long and lumpy, as if too many years of ill-fitting shoes had caused them to break out in bumps of protest.

I followed her into the bus, dropped my fare into the change box, and watched her walk up the aisle. The skirt of her pink dress was wrinkled. I tried to imagine where she had spent her day, all her days, the kind of office she worked in, the chair she sat in that had pressed wrinkles into the skirts of all her dresses.

Yesterday she had been all in lavender.

She sat in a window seat in the middle of the bus. As she slid into the seat her pink handbag, a long pouchy thing, swung and thumped against her hip. I walked past her, carefully averting my eyes so that she wouldn't notice that I had been watching her, and chose a seat two rows behind her. From there I could see her shoulders, her neck and the back of her head. I opened my newspaper and settled down for the ride.

On her head she wore a scarf of some filmy material, probably nylon. It was folded into a triangle and tied under her chin. Pink. Through it her hair, arranged in some intricate and unfashionable manner, was visible as a series of knobby clusters of curls.

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The scarf was evidently intended to keep the knobs in place.

The bus started on its long haul to the suburbs. Normally I read the paper a little, doze a little, look out the window and take note of the small changes that occur along the familiar route and the things that remain the same.

But lately I find my eyes drifting away from the newspaper and from the window and fastening on the back of her head. I no longer doze. Each day the scarf is a different color.

She was talking to her seat companion. I couldn't hear what she was saying. Her head was turned slightly so I could see her lips moving. She wore a pink lipstick and her teeth protruded just enough to give her mouth a somewhat pouting appearance. Against her sallow skin, her mouth seemed to be a separate living organism. She spoke rapidly, interspersing her words with quick half-hearted smiles. When she did this, the side of her face creased into concentric curved lines which would one day be permanent wrinkles. I guessed her age to be about 40.

The bus rattled on through the outlying part of town where ramshackle frame houses lean discouraged against each other down the slope toward the river. Normally I like to look out the window along this stretch of the ride. I was born in this part of town, although the house I grew up in was torn down long ago to make room for a new section of highway. If I feel a bit self-congratulatory as the bus carries me by this decayed remnant of my childhood, I feel I've earned it. I've worked long and hard to give my family a decent place to live.

Lately I have been distracted from even this pleasant satisfaction. I don't quite understand why it should be so, but somehow her presence on the bus produces in me a vague irritability. She is a source of discomfort, and I wish she would take a different bus. I find myself watching for her at the bus stop each evening, waiting to see what her day's color will be, and then, unconsciously at first, but quite deliberately now, taking a seat somewhere behind her so that she is never out of sight.

Let me explain that in 25 years of marriage I have never looked at another woman. My wife is small, quiet, and kind. She has never demanded more of me than I could give. I have worked for the same company all my life. I started as a messenger boy and now I am a division manager. A few years ago I realized that I would rise no higher in the company. But I am content.

My division runs smoothly. The typists come to me with their

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problems and my wife and I attend their weddings. The young men regard me as an old fogey, but they are eager to take advantage of my long experience. Some of them will rise above me in the company; others will leave. It no longer matters. In due time I will retire on full pension.

My life, like my division, has also run smoothly. My children, a boy and a girl, grew up respectful and well-mannered. My son is a science teacher in a high school on the other side of town, and my daughter is married and lives nearby. She is expecting her second child. My wife makes dresses for our three-year-old granddaughter. We have never been plagued with accident or illness, although my wife occasionally suffers from arthritis when the weather is damp.

Why, then, should I be irritated by this woman on the bus? She is nothing to me. If she chooses to dress one day entirely in pink and the next entirely in orange, and so on through the rainbow, surely that's her affair. It needn't concern me. Why do my thoughts persist in speculating on the probable contents of her closet? Particularly on the rows of shoes it must contain, neatly ranked in pairs of every conceivable color. I wonder if she's married, and what her husband thinks of this color mania of hers.

The bus rolled through the belt of light industry that serves as a boundary between town and suburb. My newspaper lay forgotten in my lap. Soon she would be getting off. My own stop lay a half mile farther on. In a way we were neighbors, although I had never seen her anywhere but on the bus.

Suddenly I yearned to know where she lived. I folded my newspaper—my wife likes to read it in the evening after dinner—and felt an unaccustomed quickening of my heartbeat.

She always pulled the signal cord for the bus to stop—even if someone else had pulled it before her, even though the bus always stopped at her corner. Perhaps she was afraid that if she personally did not pull the cord, the bus would go on and on forever and she would never be able to change into her next day's outfit, red or gray or purple, whatever it might be. Five or six people stood and lurched down the aisle while the bus was still moving. I was among them.

On the corner the people fanned out in all directions. She crossed the main road in front of the bus and headed north. I stood on the corner feeling slightly displaced and watched the bus drive away. I instantly regretted having gotten off. There was nothing

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for me to do but walk. I could follow the bus down the road to my usual stop. Or I could follow her.

At the first gap in the stream of traffic I hurried across the road. She was about half a long block ahead of me. She walked with a stiff-legged jouncy stride and the pink handbag swung rhythmically from her arm. Her pink dress had some kind of ruffled collar and this flapped up and down as she walked. The tail of the pink scarf fluttered and at one point flew up, exposing the back of her head. I could not distinguish the exact color of her hair, although it seemed to be dark, a kind of dusty brown.

She turned the corner and I hurried to catch up. My heart pounded and I was having trouble drawing breath. My legs were trembling from the effort not to run. When I reached the corner, she was nowhere in sight but the door of the third house from the corner was just closing. There was no one else on the street.

I walked on casually, taking in as much of the house as I could without stopping. It was a small house, as most of the houses were in this area, and it sat back from the street on a small plot of lawn. It was painted pale green with darker green trim. There was a wide front window with green drapes hanging open at the sides, and in the middle a green ceramic lamp with a green shade. I could see no more without stopping to stare. It was a house like all the others on the block, unrelenting in its greenness, but in no way out of the ordinary. With one exception.

The house was surrounded with flower beds. The flowers tumbled against each other with no regard for order: orange marigolds, purple petunias, stiff zinnias of many colors, daisies and delphinium, nasturtium and portulaca, all thrown in together in heaps and huddles of every kind and color. It was a surprise.

I walked on down the block. My eyes still tingled with the shock of those tumultuous flower beds. My heart slowed to its normal steady pace and I breathed more freely. My legs, however, were extremely tired and I longed for a place to sit down and rest.

Could she be the gardener? The creator of that flamboyant atrocity? Indeed, I suppose she could, although I would have expected something else. A garden of many kinds of flowers all chosen for a uniformity of color would have been my guess.

It became more and more necessary for me to sit down and pull myself together before going home. My way took me through the small shopping area of the village: a few shops, a beauty salon, the post office, and a small cocktail lounge. I had never been in-

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side the cocktail lounge. I knew that some of the bus riders stopped off there occasionally before going home. I hoped that none would be there to see me—or at least none with whom I had a nodding acquaintance. I was not in the mood for conversation.

I found myself standing at the bar before my eyes had accustomed themselves to the gloom. The bartender was attentive. I have never been much of a drinker and ordered the first thing that came into my head.

"A whiskey sour, please."

I laid my newspaper on the bar and noticed that my hands were stained with ink. The paper was damp where I had clutched it.

"The men's room?" I murmured.

The bartender pointed to a glowing sign at the rear of the long room.

As I made my way down the room I became aware that my hands were not the only part of me that had been sweating. My clothes felt limp and sodden, and in the air-conditioned chill I began to shiver uncontrollably. It had been warm outdoors, but not uncomfortably hot. I wondered if I were coming down with something, a summer cold or a touch of the flu.

I let the hot water run over my hands until the shivering stopped, then washed with the gritty powdered soap from the dispenser. As the ink ran away down the drain, I glanced into the mirror. I was shocked by what I saw.

Instantly I blamed it on the distortion of the glass, the fact that the mirror was old and flaked. But for a split second the face I saw was not my own—or rather it was my own, but with a subtle difference. The features were those I'd known for many years, the face I shaved each morning, the face whose lines and pouches and discolorations I'd accepted as badges of respectable seniority. But the mouth had an unpleasant downward quirk, the nose was pinched, and the eyes—the eyes were worst of all.

I dried my hands on the roller towel. Imagination, I thought. No sense in feeling guilty over stopping for a quick drink, even though I'd never done it before. Nothing wrong in taking a walk through the quiet suburban streets. I would have to come up with some reason for getting home late, but there would be no need to lie. I had never lied to my wife.

"It was such a nice evening, I took a walk and then stopped off for a drink."

Back at the bar my whiskey sour was sitting in a circle of wet-

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ness. I sat on the barstool and glanced around the room. It was a pleasant enough place, running heavily to wood paneling and beamed ceiling. There were perhaps five or six other customers. A man and a woman sat at a table lost in an earnest whispered conversation. The others were congregated at the end of the bar chatting raucously with the bartender. Politics or baseball, most likely. I sipped my drink. Oh, it tasted good. It was just what I needed. Strength flowed back into my legs, and the evil vision in the men's-room mirror faded from my mind.

My wife accepted my explanation without question, but she was a little disappointed that I had forgotten to bring her the newspaper. I had left it on the bar. I offered to walk down to the stationery store after dinner to get her one. I detoured past the green house with the flower beds, but saw no one.

The next evening I left the office a few minutes early and hurried to the bus stop. I wanted to get there before she did, so that I could determine from which direction she came. Things had gone badly in my division. A report that was due in the president's office the following morning had been badly botched by a new typist. She came to me in tears, claiming she had not been given adequate instructions and she couldn't read Mr. Pfister's handwriting anyway and there was no need for him to be insulting.

"He called me a dumb little idiot," she sobbed.

Normally I can settle these upheavals with a few words. Mr. Pfister was ambitious, ingratiating with those above him and overbearing with those below. The girl probably had some justification. But as she poured out her woes, I found my eyes wandering to her thin summer blouse. It had no sleeves and its round neck was cut low. It quivered with her sobs. As she bent into her handkerchief I could see that she wore no brassiere.

My thighs trembled in the kneehole of my desk. Beneath my jacket my shirt grew suddenly clammy. I wondered if my face had changed into the face I had seen in the men's-room mirror the night before. I swung my chair around to face the window.

"Go back to your desk," I said. "Do the report over and see that you get it right, even if it takes you all night."

I heard her gasp and mumble, "Yes, sir." Her soft footsteps receded. Before she reached the door, I said, "Miss—um," I couldn't remember her name. "In the future see that you dress more suitably."

She ran down the hall. A few minutes later I left and went to

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the bus stop.

The sky was the color of tarnished brass. The air was hot and heavy, and little whirlpools of wind lifted bits of scrap paper from the gutter, flapped them about, and dropped them abruptly. We would have rain. I stood on the corner and tried to look in all directions at once. I wanted to see where she came from, to find out, if I could, which building she worked in. There was still five minutes before the bus was due.

I was watching the entrance to the new glass-fronted office building across the street and might have missed her had not a screaming siren called my attention back down the street to the entrance of my own building. The police car sped past me bound for some emergency or other, but my eyes remained riveted on the high arched doorway of the building where I had invested all the working years of my life. She stood just outside the revolving doors, scanning the livid skies. Then she turned and walked with her stiff jouncing stride toward the bus stop.

I faded back into the doorway of a shop. Could it be possible she worked for my company? I had never seen her in the elevators or in the lobby. The company employed hundreds of people. It occupied the entire building. There were many divisions and sections. I suppose there were many people working there whom I didn't know. That she should be one of them seemed a bad joke on me.

As she neared the bus stop, I saw that she carried a red umbrella. Had she worn red today because she knew it would rain and she wanted her costume to match her umbrella? Or had she an umbrella as well as scarf, shoes, and handbag to match every dress in her wardrobe?

Today's red dress was tightly cinched with a red plastic belt. I had not noticed before how small her waist was, nor that she was very tall. Below the gleaming belt her haunches flared and filled the red cloth. The red shoes seemed even more hurtful than yesterday's pink ones. I was impatient for the bus to appear.

At last it came, and she was among the first to get on. Have I said that the riders of this bus are extremely well-mannered? That among this small crowd of homeward-bound suburbanites, it is customary for the gentlemen to stand back and allow the ladies to board first? I consciously violated that rule. Pretending absorption in some deep mental problem, I elbowed my way to the door of the bus and chose a seat immediately behind her. There were a

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few shocked murmurs, but I ignored them. She was joined by the same woman who had shared her seat before.

It is truly amazing how much you can learn about a person simply by listening in on fragments of conversation. For instance, I learned that she was a widow.

". . . when poor Raymond was alive . . ."

That she didn't sleep well.

". . . and those pills didn't help a bit . . ."

That she lived with her invalid sister.

". . . so I said, my sister needs that ramp for her wheel chair, so it'll just have to stay . . ."

That she didn't have a dog.

". . . I'd like to, but she's allergic to animal dander . . ."

And that she would be alone in the house over the weekend.

". . . I have to take her back to the hospital on Saturday for another series of tests. It may take a week . . ."

And all the while I watched her red mouth swimming in the placid pudding of her face. Yes, she had changed her lipstick from pink to red. I noticed, too, that at close range her cheeks were covered with a fine down and there were patches of skin where the pores had coarsened. I wondered how she failed to notice my scrutiny, but she seemed oblivious.

About halfway home the rain started. It fell straight down at first, heavy blinding sheets of water. Lightning flickered on the hilltops and the streets were quickly swamped. The bus ground slowly on, its windshield wipers barely able to cope with the deluge. She scarcely noticed the storm, but continued chatting with her neighbor. Her voice, now that I was close enough to hear it, was jarring and nasal. She was so very different from my wife.

The rain had slackened off before we reached her stop, but it was still coming down in a fine slanting spray when we got off. She was safe beneath her red umbrella. I had no protection but my newspaper. It seemed ridiculous to hold it over my head. However I held it, the paper would be soaked before I got home. I tossed it into a trash can and followed her from the bus stop.

This time I followed quite close behind her. She was engrossed in managing her umbrella, her large red handbag, and a shopping bag from a downtown department store. (Had she shopped in that store today because its shopping bags were red?) Besides, it seemed to me that she was one of those semiconscious people, only becoming aware of others when they had a direct effect on herself.

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I had no meaning in her life.

I saw her go to the door of the green house, search in her red bag for a key. I passed by as she was struggling to close her umbrella, then heard the door slam shut as I walked on. By the time I reached the cocktail lounge I was drenched and shivering.

"Whiskey," I said to the bartender and went straight to the men's room. I toweled my head on the roller towel and then quite deliberately stood before the mirror to comb my hair. The terrible face was there in the flawed mirror. This time I did not look away, but examined my reflection closely as if by doing so I could force my features back into their usual aspect of gentleness and benevolence. I was able to manage a compromise—a mask of bland indifference.

A shot glass was waiting for me on the bar, with a water chaser. I drained it and gestured for another. Tonight I would not have the excuse of taking a walk on a fine evening.

"The bus was delayed. I got soaked, so I stopped for a drink."

No use lying. My wife would smell the whiskey on my breath. When I left the cocktail lounge, I remembered to stop at the stationery store to buy another paper. The rain was only a fine mist now, but I tucked the paper under my jacket and went home.

After dinner, while my wife read the newspaper and I pretended to watch television, I thought about the woman on the bus. Why was it I never saw her in the mornings? Perhaps she took an earlier bus and had breakfast in a coffee shop downtown. Or maybe she took as late a bus as she could so as to spend more time with her invalid sister. How long had she been widowed? Did she have men friends? Did she perhaps go off on weekends with them? Did she have drawers full of underwear of many colors to match her dresses?

"Don't you feel well? You look a bit off-color."

"No, fine. I'm fine. I think I'll go to bed."

My wife had accepted my excuse, only frowned a little over my drinking, and had made me change out of my wet clothes.

"Would you like some hot tea with lemon?"

"Nothing. I'm just tired."

The next evening was Friday. She wore brown, a sad color and one that made her look unhealthy. I'd had a bad day. The vice-president in charge of marketing had named my division as one suffering from antiquated methods, and I had been called on to justify my procedures. Business was bad all over and my results

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did not look good. Rumors flew in and out of cubicles all afternoon.

I still had not been able to find out where in the company she worked. I didn't even know her name. When I followed her from the bus stop it was without the usual excitement, and my two drinks at the cocktail lounge seemed more a matter of habit than of need. I didn't go into the men's room. As I sat at the bar I thought about my retirement plans.

Years ago I had bought an old farmhouse on an isolated lake in the southeastern part of the state. We always spent our vacations there and many weekends, and I had tinkered it into passably modern condition. When I thought about the time when I would finally leave the company, it was always with the farmhouse in mind. There would be time to read—I had always promised myself that I would one day make up for my lack of a college education by reading all the world's great literature. The fishing was good, and my wife could grow a vegetable garden.

When I got home I didn't bother to make excuses for my lateness. My wife didn't demand any.

"Would you like to go to the farm this weekend?" she asked.

"No, I don't think so. Maybe next week."

On Saturday I took a walk. There didn't seem to be anyone at home in the green house. No doubt she was with her sister at the hospital.

On Sunday I took the car. I drove past the house twice in the early afternoon. On my third circuit of the block I saw her coming down the drive with her hands full of gardening tools. She wore faded green slacks and a green smock. Her gardening gloves were green and her head was covered with a green scarf. I couldn't see her shoes.

I parked the car around the corner and walked back. The street was deserted except for the two of us.

"What a lovely garden," I called out, hovering on the sidewalk and hoping that my face was safely keeping to its usual unremarkable lines.

"Oh," she said. "Why, thank you. It's a lot of hard work."

"Must be. I never have much luck with flowers. I guess I must be lazy."

"Oh, now," she tittered. "It's not *that* difficult. But people do say I have a green thumb."

"Now, tell me," I said, taking the liberty of crossing the lawn to

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where she stood. "How do you get such good results with carnations? Mine are always so spindly and have hardly any blooms at all."

I listened to a long harangue on fertilizers, bone meal, and the efficacy of good drainage, nodding wisely all the while, my eyes fixed on her green sneakers. At the conclusion she giggled girlishly and said, "Well, I've talked your ear off and myself into a fine thirst. Would you care for a glass of iced tea?"

"That's very kind of you. It's pretty hot out here in the sun."

"Well, come on inside. It's always nice to meet a fellow gardener. Someone who understands."

I understood. I'd seen her sharp glance at the third finger of my left hand. I've never worn a wedding band.

We went round to the back door. Across half of the back steps lay a sturdily braced wooden ramp.

"My sister," she explained. "She's confined to a wheel chair. She'd be much happier in a nursing home, but after my husband died she insisted on living with me. To keep me company, she says. To keep an eye on me, I say. But don't worry. She's not here today."

We entered the kitchen. It was yellow. Yellow wallpaper, yellow cabinets, yellow cloth on the table. Even a yellow refrigerator. She poured tea into tall yellow glasses.

"Do you live around here?" she asked.

"Not far. I have to confess, I saw your flowers a few days ago and came back in the hope of meeting the person responsible."

"You must be married." She certainly believed in coming to the point.

"I have been." Sometimes a little lie is unavoidable.

"Come into the living room. We can be comfortable there."

The house was small. I stood in the kitchen doorway and looked into the green living room, the magenta dining room, a rose-colored bedroom. On the open door of a closet in the bedroom hung a blue dress. On the floor a pair of blue shoes stood ready. Tomorrow was Monday.

"May I trouble you for another napkin? I've slopped my tea a little."

She obligingly went across the kitchen to a cupboard. I picked up her green gardening gloves. She had large hands. I picked up the knife with which she had sliced a lemon for the tea . . .

Afterward I was really thirsty. I drank the tea. It was slightly

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warm. My clothes were damp. I left the green gardening gloves on the yellow counter. I went out by the back door and drove home.

On Monday morning the office was agog. One of the telephone operators had been brutally murdered in her home. The police came and interviewed everyone who had known her. They ignored my division. The rumor that went the rounds had it that she had been stabbed 27 times. It seemed a bit exaggerated to me. My division ran smoothly that day.

In the evening I went to the bus stop. I looked for her in her blue dress, but she didn't come. Maybe she had taken an earlier bus. Or perhaps she was working late. She could even be on vacation.

I settled down on the bus and opened my newspaper. The woman sitting in front of me had the most irritating way of shaking her head as she talked to her seat companion. She wore long dangling earrings and they distracted me from my newspaper, from the view out the bus window.

Perhaps I'll take the early retirement option.

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"Perhaps the hardest part about dying was waiting for it to happen" . . .

THE MAN WITH THE GUN

by JERROLD PHAON

He wasn't sure how long he had been sitting there, staring at the man with the gun—it could have been a few minutes or a few hours. It seemed like months or years. Perhaps it was.

The man with the gun was familiar enough, although he seemed much older now than he'd ever noticed before: his hair was iron-gray and thinning, and the jaw was losing its firmness, going slack with age under the chin. The eyes were the worst part about him. They were empty and sunken, shadowed by heavy lines of despair and defeat. Eyes that were haunted.

The revelation sent a cold chill through him. The gun was a .38 caliber revolver, a police special, and it was fully loaded. Its tinted metal and gaping barrel glinted in the space between them like a surrealistic one-dimensional reflection.

"Well, what are you waiting for?" he said dully. "Get it over with and be done with it."

"There's no rush," the man with the gun said. His voice still lacked resolution, despite the authority of the gun. "You don't do something like this every day."

"I suppose you're right," he said. "I deserve to suffer."

"It's your own damn fault," the man with the gun said. "You made the mess. Nobody twisted your arm to take the money."

"I should have known better," he said. "I had a good career on the Force. Only two years away from retirement. Now it's all over."

"All over," the man with the gun echoed.

They stared at each other, only inches apart, and he tried not to look at the gun. But he knew that before long he would be dead, and he couldn't help wondering what it was like to die.

When he was much younger he had had sudden cold flashes of the realization that he was mortal, that one day he would die.

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He'd been a policeman for nearly 20 years, and in the course of his career three men had died because of him, but he learned not to think about that. He had been wounded once, a bullet in the thigh, so he knew about the pain of being shot. The bullet had lodged close to a major artery, and he knew the fear of dying too.

But even though he had often wondered when and where and under what circumstances he would die, he had never, until this moment, come face to face with the certainty that in a matter of seconds he would cease to exist.

He knew it would be messy. A gunshot wound at close range was always messy. He had seen enough victims during his career to know what it would be like when they found him. It was odd to think about the mess like that, clinically, knowing that he was going to be the mess. It was the cop in him; his suspension from the Force still hadn't deprived him of his policeman's instincts.

He hoped his daughter wouldn't be the one to find his body. She had gone through enough, had shared his shame, and now this. But he knew she was a strong girl—during the months his wife was dying, Virginia had spent every spare moment at the house, taking care of her mother, bucking him up so he could go out the door each morning and face the world. That was before he started taking the payoffs, when he prided himself on being a clean cop.

But after Eleanor had died, nothing much seemed to matter. There had been heavy debts that hadn't been covered by the insurance and he was sick and tired of all the years he and Eleanor had had to go without the little luxuries they couldn't afford on his salary. Taking the money seemed to be the easiest thing to do.

"There was no excuse for it," the man with the gun said.

"I was a good husband. A good father. You can't deny that," he said defiantly.

Virginia had been to the house that morning, had picked some crocuses for him. "Spring's on its way," she'd said cheerfully, filling a glass with tap water and arranging the sprigs of crocus around the rim. "Aren't they pretty?"

The flowers were on the table now, where he could see them. Eleanor had loved crocus too: he'd taken some to her in the hospital on the day she died. That had been two years ago. She never saw the spring. Now it looked as though he too would never see another spring.

"Hurry up," he said to the man with the gun.

"Calm down," was the reply.

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"Either do it or don't do it."

"I got things to think about first," said the man with the gun.

Like what? he wanted to know. The money, the dirty stinking money he'd taken so Jimmy the Leg could run his dirty stinking numbers operation. In the old days he would have spat at a creep like Jimmy the Leg. Death would probably be a favor now, a blessing.

Perhaps the hardest part about dying was waiting for it to happen. Waiting. He could hear the furnace droning, the wind whistling hollowly through the rain spouts. The cuckoo clock he had brought back from Germany after the war ticked ominously. They were empty sounds, would continue even after he was dead.

He waited for the man with the gun to do something, to make up his mind, to finish what he'd started.

The phone started ringing then. It rang five times, insistently, but he made no move to answer it. A sixth ring; a seventh. Finally the man with the gun became impatient and said, "Pick it up. But watch what you say."

He got up, turned his back on the man with the gun, crossed the room to the phone, and picked it up.

"Daddy?"

"Hello, Virginia," he said.

"What took you so long to answer? Is something wrong?"

He glanced to the other side of the room. The man had moved out of view, but he could still see the gun resting on the table top.

"I'm fine, fine," he said. "Now you stop worrying. You must have a million things to do without worrying about me."

"You sound upset."

"It's nothing."

"I've made some homemade soup. I'm going to bring some over. It's mother's recipe. You said how much you missed having it."

"That's fine, Virginia. But you shouldn't go to all that bother."

"I'll bother as much as I want," she said, then added, "Stubborn old mule. Did you take your pill?"

"I took the pill," he lied.

"The doctor says they'll help you to relax, so make sure you keep taking them. One every six hours."

"Don't worry, dear."

"Everything'll be all right, Daddy," she said, and in that instant he remembered that part of her was still his little girl. He felt himself grow cold with fear and panic. He turned his back on the

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gun, supporting himself against the table, and cried out, "Virginia!"

"Don't!" the man with the gun snapped. "Don't say anything more. Hang up the phone."

"Daddy? Daddy!"

He hung up and went back to his chair. The man with the gun was shaking his head. "That was a dumb thing to try," he said.

"I know."

"Your daughter can't help you. No one can help you. It's too late for help."

"Are you going to do it now?"

"When I'm ready," said the man with the gun irritably.

"Make it quick. Get it over with."

"You don't think I enjoy this, do you?"

"It's stupid to drag it out."

"It took a long time to create the mess you made of your life. What difference could it possibly make if you have a few more minutes of life?"

"You're just putting it off," he said. "My daughter is probably on her way over here right now."

"Isn't that what you want?" the man with the gun said.

"It won't make any difference," he answered softly. "If you don't do it today, you'll do it another time."

He was sweating now, and his hands had begun to tremble. A few more seconds of life. What difference could it make in the face of eternity? Some children passed noisily on the sidewalk out front. The clock continued to tick. His hands stopped trembling. "Now. Do it now!" The gun barrel rose.

Then he heard a car squeal to a stop out front. A door opened and shut. Through the window blinds he could see Virginia hurrying up the snow-clogged sidewalk.

It was the last thing he saw before the gun roared in his face.

"I don't understand it," Virginia said. She was sitting in a chair in his bedroom. She stared at the three citations on the wall above the dresser.

"It happens," Detective-Sergeant Ealey said. He'd been called in for this sort of thing before, but he still never had a ready answer. "We aren't always sure why it happens, but it happens just the same."

"I just saw him this morning. Everything seemed fine. Then on

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the phone—I knew something was wrong." She began to sob. "If only I'd got here sooner."

"Please believe me, Mrs. Tremont," Detective-Sergeant Ealey said. "You had no way of knowing this was going to happen."

"If only there was a reason for it." She got up and left the room. From the hallway she could look into the other room, the room where it had happened. The coroner's men had already placed him on a stretcher, covered him up, and taken him away.

Everything else in the room was just as she had found it. The chair that he had been sitting in when the shot took his life was still toppled over. She crossed the room and set the chair on its legs. Then she saw her reflection in the wall mirror above the table. It startled her.

"You've got to face it," Detective-Sergeant Ealey said as gently as he could. "Your father was going up on criminal charges. That's why he took his own life."

"Q"

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another bicentennial story by

S. S. RAFFERTY

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THE WITCH OF NEW HAMPSHIRE

by S. S. RAFFERTY

"It would seem to me," I said to Captain Cork with general irritation, "that Parliament has overstepped itself. I say, let the Almighty take care of the calendar and let those august gentlemen sitting in London keep their noses out of our sunrises and sunsets."

The Captain sat across from me at the table in our rooms at the Sign of the Two Doves. On my side of the board were the ever-present account books, on his was a plate of steamed lobster. As usual, I was working and he was idling, with shellfish. We had come to the New Hampshire town of Berryport to scout for future refittings of *The Hawkers,* the ship Cork owns but never sails in. That is, *I* came for refitting arrangements; Cork was deeply involved in determining if lobster went better with drawn butter or a mixture of brine and vinegar. I had just finished reading a report in the Boston *Gazette* about Parliament's inane enactment to adjust our calendar to correct the inaccuracies the Julian calendar had made of timekeeping. Gregorian, indeed!

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"You realize," I went on, "that we have all had our lives shortened by eleven days. That's God's purlieu, not a legislature's."

He looked up from cracking a huge red claw with his pistol butt and smiled. "Don't saddle the Deity with the authorship of keeping time, Oaks. That's man's invention, and he's stuck with it. Having the calendar jump from September second to September 14, 1752 has its compensations. There isn't a manjack among us who wouldn't like to expunge a few days from his life here and there. I suspect your rancour stems from the fact that this is September fifth, and your dratted ledgers now contain the jottings of three days that no longer exist. Your problem is easily solved, however. Merely strike off the old dates and pen in the new ones."

Of course he was japing me. He knows that my "dratted ledgers" are the neatest and most scrupulously kept accounts in these colonies. Perhaps in the world at large. I, Wellman Oaks, financial yeoman, accept my fate as a crosser of t's and a dotter of i's. He is, on the other hand, Captain Jeremy Cork, six foot six inches of insouciance who mocks my efforts to make him the richest man in the Americas. All that truly stimulates him are these "social puzzles" which are always entangling us.

Had I known that, at the very moment, the town of Berryport was abrew with a bizarre mystery, I might have wished that Parliament had eliminated the year 1752 altogether.

My first clew that something foul was abroad in the vicinage was the appearance, later that afternoon, of Major Philip Tell at our doorsill.

Major Tell is a King's colonial agent-at-large, but for me he is a vexing *avant courier* of crime and mayhem. Time and again he has dragged the Captain into investigations that divert our energies and produce not one half-joe to our coffers. This humid afternoon he outdid himself in presenting the macabre. Needless to say, his tale was a more interesting morsel to Cork than a lobster claw, and His Nibs gave up the shellfish to listen.

"Thank you, Oaks," Tell said when I poured him a mug of Cork's Apple Knock. He took a draught and let his lips shiver at its bite. Most people's eyes tear, but Tell is a seasoned field soldier. He turned to Cork. "As you know, Captain, I am not given to hysterical assumptions, but there seems no other answer to this Berryport problem."

"First, Major, what is the problem?"

"Witchcraft, and worse, I fear."

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"That *is* hysteria, and sounds more like a conclusion. Can we have the legs on which it stands?"

Tell pulled his chair closer to us and lowered his voice. "Missing children—females. Six in all over the last half year. All between fourteen and sixteen. The last two, the Derby twins, disappeared two days ago without a trace."

"Kidnapping," I said.

"No ransom was asked, Oaks," Tell said, "making kidnapping unlikely. The countryside has been scoured and all outgoing vessels thoroughly searched after each disappearance, and of course, the Covenant is deeply distressed."

"The Covenant?" Cork asked. "Why not the populace?"

"The Covenant *is* the populace of Berryport, Captain, or most of it. The town was founded just twenty years ago by the Covenant of the Cleansed, and it is still the dominant factor in its daily life. All the girls were daughters of congregation members.

"And how does the witchcraft enter in?"

"Because, Captain"—Tell took another swallow of Knock—"it seems I have found a witch. You'll have to admit that's nothing new in this New England of yours."

"If you are referring to the Salem charade of over a hundred years ago, I can assure you its seeds were imported. But let's not quibble with history. Who is this witch and how is she spiriting these women away? Note I do not say 'children,' as you did, Major. It is a misleading word, considering their ages, and it's best to start a case with a proper eye."

"Women, granted," Tell said, "but virgins and children in the eyes of their parents and the congregation."

Cork grunted, put on that smirk-a-mouth of his, and Tell went on: "I was called in when the fourth *woman* disappeared in mid-August, and was as perplexed as anyone. I was determined that it would never happen again, and garrisoned two squads of troops in the town. Checkpoints were set up at the three roads leading out of town, all goods going aboard vessels were searched, and random patrols circulated in woods beyond the farmlands. And yet, just two days ago, the Derby twins vanished." Tell snapped his fingers for emphasis. "Of course, the answer was there in front of us all the time. By the Duke's guns, the children of this town even call her a witch—The Witch of Weymore Alley."

"And the taunting chants of children become fiat identification? Come, Major, they call you and your fellow redcoats 'lobsterbacks,'

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but I don't think you're in any danger of the steaming pot."

Tell ignored the "lobsterback" quip and continued: "The children's description merely piqued my interest in the Weymore woman.

"The widow Weymore lives at the end of a cul-de-sac known as Weymore Alley, and a more horrid hag I have never seen. She was respectable in her time, I am told—the wife of a ship's first mate who was lost at sea, leaving her with an infant son. She raised the boy poorly, it seems, for he grew to be a lout of a lad, fond of gaming and carousing. Five years ago, when the son was eighteen or so, he went out for his usual night of revels. His mother, who doted on the lad, sat in her window with a candle, as she did every night until he returned.

"On this particular night her son never did return, and she's kept the candlelight vigil each and every night from dusk till dawn ever since."

"What happened to the son?" I asked.

"No one is sure. It is thought that he fell to fighting with some sailors and was killed and his body disposed of."

"My, my," Cork chuckled. "This town abounds in disappearances. But, Major, how can you deduce that the widow is a witch on the basis of some odd behaviour?"

Tell's face was beaming as he withdrew a fold of paper from his tunic. "By direct testimony, my old friend. When I first learned of the widow Weymore's existence, I quickly procured a copy of Cotton Mather's study in witchcraft, *Memorable Providences*, and, by jing, if some of the facts of this case don't match those he encountered in Salem!"

He unfolded the paper and read aloud: "Item one. On April 9, Sally Trent, the first girl to disappear, was observed near Weymore Alley at dusk. It is assumed she was going to take the Witch Walk."

Both Cork and I looked puzzled.

"It's a local custom among the young girls hereabouts," Tell explained. "A single girl who walks down the alley alone and stares directly into the witch's eyes will be married within the next moon's last quarter. A harmless enough game, but on the morning of the tenth Sally was missing. Of course, a hue and cry was raised, but no one thought about the widow at first.

"Item two. Giles Cooper, a local farmer, recalls having spit while passing the alley on May 10. That night all his milk cows

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died of disease, and on the twelfth his youngest daughter was gone. Don't you see how the pattern forms? This list contains twelve different occasions when animals died or crops went bad after someone had passed through the alley and looked at the witch. There you have it, clear as crystal."

"There *you* have it," Cork said, "as clear as coincidence and superstition can muddle it. You're aware that Cotton Mather not only investigated witchcraft, he also created its American manifestations. I think you have swallowed a bad carp, Major. What's your next step? Perhaps you will toss the widow Weymore into the sea, and if she drowns, it will prove she is innocent. That's the approved method of judgement, is it not?"

Tell laughed aloud and shook a finger in Cork's direction. "You're japing me, Captain. I may not be able to pin her as a witch on the basis of this"—he tapped the paper—"but to-night I will have undeniable proof. I am convinced the Derby twins are still somewhere in this town. In fact, they are at the house at the end of Weymore Alley, and I intend to take it by storm and free those virgins. I thought perhaps you would like to be in on the hunt."

"Does the widow live alone?" Cork wanted to know. I could see from the squint of his eyes that he was honing his senses.

"Yes."

"And she is elderly, you say?"

"Ancient, Captain."

"And at what hour do you mount this attack?"

"Precisely at the stroke of eight. A full squad will be deployed."

"Only a squad! Well, best have each man wear a piece of hemlock on his person, just to play safe."

"Hemlock?" Tell thought for a moment and then it struck him. "Of course, hemlock as a bane against her powers. Excellent thinking. But does hemlock grow hereabouts?"

"I have no idea, since I have never been in Berryport before."

The Major was quite taken with the suggestion, and rushed away to implement it, promising to return for us before eight o'clock.

"Isn't wolfbane the thing to ward off evil?" I asked as Cork got up from the table to wash his hands in a side bucket.

"Or garlic, or roses, or a dead haddock, for all the good it would do. Tell is a competent soldier, but an ass at ratiocination. In his desperation he reaches for the occult to solve his problem. Do you

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actually believe that an ancient old crone could overpower healthy young women?"

"She could have lured them into her house. Young women are impressionable."

"And then what? No, Oaks, there are too many avenues of exploration open. Perhaps they left of their own accord—fled with lovers. This Covenant of the Cleansed doesn't sound like a group given to hot-blooded fancy, and might well be escaped from. But we'll have to nose about, my old son, and harvest some facts. Let's take a look at this infamous Alley before darkness falls."

Directions were easily come by, and within ten minutes' walk of the Sign of the Two Doves we found ourselves in the waterfront area. Although the cul-de-sac bore no marking, it was undeniably the place. It was a narrow, cobbled walkway leading back some twenty yards to a small ramshackle house badly in need of repair. The house's frontage had one tiny window on the lower floor, and one door. The upper floor was blind. Flanking the alley on either side were shops in the nautical trades—to the left a ship's chandlery and to the right a food provisioner.

Cork was surveying the scene when a man emerged from the chandlery and began to lock the door behind him.

"Excuse me, sir, are you shut for the day?" Cork asked him.

"That's what my sign says," the man said gruffly, pointing to a small sign that read: EBENEZER CUTLER. *Sunup to sunset, daily except Sabbath.* "If you have business, it will have to wait, for I have two ships just in that I must tend to."

"By all means, Mr. Cutler. My own vessel will not arrive for a week or so. I'm told you have fine spars available in Berryport."

"Finest money can buy." Seeing that we were potential customers, he had softened his stern tone, and almost smiled. He was as tall and spare as the ships' spars he was lauding.

Cork introduced us and got him into general conversation which he deftly steered towards the twins' recent disappearance. His ability to extract information through the manipulation of idle chatter marks him as a verbal helmsman of the first water.

"Six lassies, you say?" he chattered, "and all seen near this alley, Mr. Cutler? My, my, what are times coming to?"

"We of the Covenant have taken steps, I can assure you. A high-ranking King's officer is now in charge and he promises results within days."

"Excellent. When the King's hand is in, things are set to rights.

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Tell me, why is this called an 'alley'? It is not a thoroughfare."

"It was built by old Fergus Weymore before anything else was erected around here. Now I must be off, gentlemen. I look forward to doing business with you."

My timepiece said six o'clock, and I asked the Captain if we should return to the inn for supper.

"No, Oaks, we have other meat to chew on this day. Let us try the food provisioner's shop."

We strode across the alley and I chanced another glance—it was not yet dusk—and the window, that small, mysterious cyclops' eye of the house, was vacant. The doorstop bell of Mr. Giles Plunkett's shop tinkled as we entered, and a dark-haired woman with tawny skin and fierce black eyes came out from a back room where I could see all kinds of meat hanging on hooks and great head-cheese pots brewing.

"Good evening, Senorita," Cork said in the charming tone he uses when a woman strikes his fancy.

She smiled and corrected him. "Senora, sir. I am Mrs. Plunkett. What can I do for you?"

"I thought we might get a little sustenance, a *minestra*."

Throaty laughter. "We sell only in bulk, sir, although from your size, you look as if you could eat a galley bare. There is an inn up the town."

"And that I know, Mrs. Plunkett. My mission here is to sample. I am Captain Jeremy Cork, and my ship, *The Hawkers*, will make port here for a refitting within the month. I want to assure myself that fresh goods are available."

"Good or bad, it will have to come from this shop, Captain. It's the only one about. Strange, a ship's master walks ahead of his vessel?"

As she spoke, I was revising my original opinion of her. She was indeed a woman of uncommon acuity.

"The vessel is to me a child to be fed, not a mistress to be fawned over, Senora. We shall be placing a rather large order, and I—"

"What is all this, Dolores?" a voice asked from the back room. It was followed by its owner into the front of the shop.

He was short and powerful, with ox-like shoulders and massive forearms, and he was obviously perturbed with the woman's dalliance in idle chatter. When she had explained the situation and introduced him as her husband, Giles Plunkett, his mood became

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less suspicious, but certainly not more congenial.

"We'll be pleased to provision you, Captain Cork," he said, "but we've got two barks in the harbour now waiting on us. There's much corning to be done. Dolores!"

"Go back to your work and leave the front counter to me," she snapped, and to my surprise he responded with a docile shrug and returned to the back room.

"He gets pawky with strangers," she said. "I'll fetch you a sample of my wares, Captain, but it will be a slim portion, mind, for we have just enough for the two ships in port." She went into the back room and returned shortly with a plate containing a small piece of head cheese and two thin slices of meat. The meat was far from delectable, being slightly stringy and strong. Cork swallowed his portion and asked, "Deer meat, Senora?"

"That's all that's available. Deer and bear, since the cattle and chickens died off over the spring and summer."

"Oh, yes," Cork said. "I heard it was the result of some sort of spell."

The woman's face became serious and hard-lined. "So now they have started on the old lady, have they?" She gritted her teeth in anger. "This Covenant crowd should be horsewhipped. They put on their pious ways and show no charity to a toothless old crone. Their children torment her, and now the adults are at it. My Giles told them the animals died of the pox, not of spells." She shrugged. "They are fools, all of them. The old lady is harmless. They just want to be rid of her, for fear she'll become a public charge. The chandler across the way is always after her to sell her house to him. But where would she go? I take her scraps of food now and then and some bread and milk. She needs little."

Her anger seemed to cool and she returned to business, asking us particulars of *The Hawkers'* needs. Cork, however, was anxious to leave, and told her we would deal with the precise details later. As we were leaving, Cork bid her good day in Spanish, and to my surprise she threw back her head and laughed. "I am Portuguese, not Spanish, sir," she proclaimed proudly.

"A thousand pardons." Cork bowed. "Lisbon is a beautiful city."

She laughed again. "Perhaps. I have never been there. I am from Ponte Delgarda"—she shook a finger at Cork—"so I know you sailors well."

"She's quite a spirited woman," I said when we were once more on the street.

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"Most of the women of the Azores are," he chuckled. "And I imagine she is the backbone of the shop's management. Best keep an eye peeled when we deal with her again." He started to stroll off towards the dock area, and I called after him. "The inn is the other way, Captain, and we just have time for a bite before eight o'clock."

"We've had our bite, Oaks, but now something bites at me. Come, let us find the port captain's headquarters."

"The port captain?" I asked, falling into step with him.

"Several times to-day, people have referred to 'two ships' in the harbour, but there is a third ship moored in the lee of that cove in the outer harbour. Let's find out about it."

Captain Lewis Fuller, the port captain, looked more the ship's cook than an ex-skipper. He was quite obese, and made little effort to waste movement. We sat opposite him sharing a mug of rum as he answered Cork's questions.

"That ship in yonder cove be the *Queen of Prussia,* lads. This is her home port, or maybe her graveyard. Ain't out of the harbour more than once the year for fishing. I understand she was a deep-water vessel in trade, but that was before I took over back in '35. Belongs to the Covenant.

"She looks a fifty-tonner," Cork said. "Shame to waste her in casual fishing."

The Portmaster grinned broadly. "Don't try to make no sense out of that lot of psalm singers, Captain Cork. I never could."

"Of what persuasion are they? I had never heard of the Covenant before coming here."

The old sailor tamped his clay bowl, relit, and puffed. " 'Pears to me they made it up all by themselves. They're God-fearing all right, too God-fearing for my likes. Take the rum works, for instance. When I came aboard this billet, I was looking forward to having a local source of supply. But then the Covenant shut the works down just a year or so after I came. How's that for bad navigating? Now I have to rely on a few coasters to keep my cup full."

"Tell me, Captain Fuller," Cork wanted to know, "do many ships make this their port of call?"

"We refit about six or seven a year. The woods hereabouts yield fine naval timber."

Cork then asked if either of the two ships now calling on the port had ever been here before. Fuller scratched his head, then

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rose and took down a logbook. Flipping through the pages, he stopped and looked up. "Wanted to put a fire under my memory bone," he said. "One of them has—the *Lady of Castile,* over four months ago. Trades in salt fish and madeira on the return passage. Pretty good madeira at that."

I checked my timepiece and reminded Cork that it was approaching eight o'clock and he rose to leave. "Thank you, Captain Fuller," he said. "One last question. When was the *Queen of Prussia* last on a fishing trip?"

"Last month. Had a bit of a meat shortage, and the town needed the fish. God, I hate cod!"

With some degree of understanding, Cork said he preferred shellfish himself.

We were again into the night air, and I suggested that we go directly to Weymore Alley, since it was almost time for the siege.

"A siege of shadows, Oaks. Our time is better spent on substance. We'll leave the witch hunt to Major Tell. Now we must find a dory and take a little exercise at the oars."

"Oars? Dory? Captain, I don't understand. Are were going out to the *Lady of Castile*?"

"Not the *Castile,* Oaks, the *Queen of Prussia.*"

I followed him as usual, loyal but bewildered. He was on to a scent, but I had not a smell of it.

Half an hour later we had stolen aboard the deserted ship. Cork prowled about her decks and then led the way into the darkness below, our small lantern serving as a weak source of light as we made our way down the passage. We felt along the bulkhead until we were at the door of the most aft cabin, slipped inside, and Cork surveyed what was obviously the master's quarters.

"Are we looking for anything in particular?"

"Of course, Oaks. Ah, we are in luck! The master of this vessel follows tradition, and leaves his logbook aboard." He had lifted the object from a drawer, and, in the lantern's light, I saw his face break into a broad grin. He turned the pages as I held the light higher so we could read. He had turned to the earlier entries and read them quickly.

"Looks like an ordinary logbook to me," I said. Page after page recording common shipboard happenings and ports of call. Cargoes of fish en route to Europe, goods on return.

"Do you think so, my boy? Come, the light is not good, but what looks odd about this log?"

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"Well, the pages are of vellum, which is a little expensive for a ship's log, but—"

"And that, added to the other facts, makes me suspicious."

"What other facts?"

"Well, for one, the first mate of this vessel was Fergus Weymore, the widow's husband, and her master was Mr. Ebenezer Cutler, our grumpy chandler, as it shows here. Strange, Weymore was lost at sea on the last Atlantic voyage, in 1732."

"I may be dense, but how is that strange? This was his home port."

"You know, Oaks, this started out to be a simple case, one easily solved, but now we have a double mystery, and the second is more intriguing than the first. Come, we have work to do."

"You're taking the log?"

"To be sure. If I have it right, it is you who have given me the answer."

How anyone could supply an answer when he didn't even know the question was beyond me. When we were back ashore, Cork made straight for the Two Doves, and proceeded to embark on a frenzy of activity. First, he commandeered a corner of the kitchen and had a large open kettle put to boil. Then he dispatched two kitchen boys on separate errands. One was to go to Giles Plunkett's shop and procure all the hooves and horns of the carcasses available, and the bile sac of any one animal. The second lad was sent to the local apothecary to bring back a large portion of brimstone.

When all the items had been assembled, Cork put the horns and hooves into the boiling kettle and added a fistful of sulphur.

"Now we shall let that cook while we repair to the public rooms for a libation," he said.

As we drank some Knock and shared some cheese and cornbread, I asked what all this hubabub in the kitchen was about. "Are you brewing up some witchcraft of your own, Captain?"

"On the contrary, we are about to embark on an endeavour as old as the Pharoahs, Oaks. We noted aboard the *Queen of Prussia* that the pages of the log were of expensive vellum, and not plain paper, as one would expect. When I told you earlier to-day about all of us wishing we could expunge some days out of our lives, I didn't realise it was an omen. You see, I believe the vellum pages were used by design to hide something."

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"Secret writing!" I exclaimed.

"In a sense. The pages of the log may be a palimpsest. You look confused, Oaks. A palimpsest is a document, on parchment or vellum, from which the original writing has been scraped and new writing inscribed over it. The Egyptians used it as a method to reclaim a writing surface when the original document was considered outdated. The monks of the Middle Ages did the same thing. The original writing was removed by soaking the vellum in milk, then sprinkling the wet surface with flour. Once dry, the writing was rubbed off with pumice or chalk. When the cleansing process was completed, it gave them a blank page for re-use. Yet the old priests of Isis knew that the original message was not lost forever. Out there in the kitchen we are preparing the Mist of Ammon by boiling the hooves and horns of animals."

"Of course! I thought the odor was ammoniacal, but why the brimstone?"

"Be up to date, old son. Call it sulphur."

"And the bile sac and alcohol?"

"That is our second step. By treating the pages with this mixture, we will hopefully bring out the original entry."

"It sounds most ingenious, but you haven't soaked the pages in milk."

"Because I suspect we haven't all night to spare, since the Major is now storming the Weymore house. Besides, cleaning each page would take weeks. But we have several things to our advantage. If someone had cleansed the pages and wrote in a new entry, it would be impossible for them to cover the original completely, word for word, line for line. There would be gaps because the writer would be working with blank sheets of paper again."

"But which pages do you plan to treat? There are so many, stretching over several years of voyages."

He ruffled through the log pages and stopped at a place far back in the book. "This entry intrigues me for several reasons." He pushed the book over to me, and I read:

> 17 May, 1732—Lng. 20. Lat. 45. Nor'westerly heading, fair winds. Mr. Weymore went to the Lord to-day, taken by fever. Buried at sea and may God rest his soul. Main topsail fully repaired. Supplies are ample. Mr. Kittery, second mate, appointed to first mate's berth.

"I see the connection. Do you think Weymore was murdered,

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Captain? And even so, what has that to do with the missing girls?"

"Perhaps nothing. But it is the last Atlantic voyage of the *Queen of Prussia,* and the dead man's widow is Tell's prime suspect. Ah, here is our Major now. Best tuck that log under your jacket, my boy."

The Major strode across the public room with a pleased grin on his face. As he took a chair, we could see that he was breathless with excitement.

"Where the devil were you?" he exclaimed. "You weren't here when I came by earlier, and you missed the entire show."

"A fruitful endeavour then, Major? And I thought you were off on a sleeveless errand."

"Not this fellow, Cork." Tell thumped his tunic with a finger.

"Then the girls are safe and the problem solved, hey?"

The Major's grin lost all its support, and he pursed his mouth. "No, not exactly. The girls could be found nowhere in the house. My men tore it apart and found not a trace of them. But I think I have the answer, and I fear, gentlemen, that it is a gruesome business indeed." He turned and hailed a sergeant who had been standing by the taproom door. As he marched forward, I could see he carried a cloth sack in his hands. He deposited the sack on the table and returned to his station.

"She's a witch, all right," Tell said, emptying the sack's contents onto the table, "for those are the tools of her devilish trade."

There before us was an odd, almost obscene, collection of items. A carved wooden statue of a grotesque monster in a man's form, something that looked like a child's rattle (save this odious thing was fashioned from bones that resembled human fingers), two human skulls, and a deadly sort of knife made from what appeared to be bone and carved with symbols beyond my ken. Cork picked up each piece and inspected it carefully.

"They certainly look ominous," I said.

"That she-devil used them in her evil rites, to be sure, Oaks. And you, Cork? What have you to say?"

"Simple enough. Where are the missing girls?"

"I venture we are going to find those poor innocents buried in her back yard. I have ten shovels at it now, and should have an answer by morning. I wish I had more troops, though. The townspeople have gotten wind of it, and they are in an angry mood."

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"A suggestion then," Cork said. "I would enlist the aid of the two Captains moored in the harbour. Their crews could help you to maintain order."

"Excellent idea, Cork. At least, you've been of some help to me in this affair. I suspected from the first that I hadn't piqued your curiosity as in the past. What's the matter, Captain? Has Oaks finally turned you into a bookkeeper?"

As Tell refilled the sack and got up to leave, Cork smiled. "You might say it is just that, Major. This *is* your night for clever deductions."

Turned him into a bookkeeper, indeed. I could more readily fly to the moon. Cork sat there in silence, thinking, when Merton, the innkeeper, came up to us in a lather.

"Mind, Captain, I am honoured to have you under my roof, but this foul concoction you have brewing in my kitchen is enough to peel the insides of a body's nose."

"Not for long, mine host, it is almost ready. Tell me, I have heard about six girls who have disappeared from the area. Did you know them?"

"Indeed I did, sir—by name and sight, at least. I'm a newcomer, and not of the Covenant or any church."

"All pretty, I imagine."

"As pictures, sir."

"And fair-haired?"

The innkeeper nodded.

"You are the second person I've met today who is relatively new hereabouts. Are there others?"

"Well, I'd say quite a few. The Covenant folk settled the town and didn't invite new settlers for a number of years. I'd say most of the tradespeople are new—that is, in the last ten years or so."

Ten minutes later we were back in the kitchen, and Merton was right—the place reeked with noxious fumes. At his request I gave Cork the logbook, and he carefully held the page with the 17 May entry over the bubbling kettle.

"We may be on a false trail, sir," I said as my eyes began to tear. "The items Tell found certainly point to some kind of skulduggery, don't you think?"

"They point to witchcraft, to be sure, but—ah, that should do it. I don't want the ink to run. Now some of the bile mixture. Hand me that cloth there on the table."

He applied the reddish-purple substance carefully on the areas

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of the page that were blank and then gently dabbed it dry.

"We have something, my boy. Not much, but something."

I looked at the page and at first there seemed to be only blotches; but peering closer, I could see the fragmented remnants of part of the original entry. Some words stood out thusly:

start of midd passage
uprising eymore dead
escape to sea
suicides abound
set s

"A mutiny!" I cried. "There was a mutiny aboard the *Queen of Prussia*. But why try to hide it? The crew escaped to sea, it seems."

Cork was about to speak when a voice called our names from the doorway to the public rooms. It was the sergeant who had accompanied Major Tell earlier. He breathlessly described a desperate situation and delivered a message from the Major.

While the soldiers were digging in the widow Weymore's back yard, a group of townspeople had breached the house and taken the old woman off to the Church of the Covenant. The squad and the crews from the two ships had gone off in hot pursuit, but the Covenant's leaders refused to give their captive up, stating they intended to try her as a witch. Major Tell was hesitant to use force to save the widow, and requested that Cork come and make some suggestions.

It was a brisk walk to the church seven blocks away, and when we arrived, Tell looked grave. "A damnable dilemma, Cork."

"And of your own making, I'm afraid, Major. I think diplomacy will have to serve where force has failed."

"What should we do?" Tell asked somberly. "I am at your command."

That, I knew, was not an easy statement for a proud soldier to make, but, true to the breed, he was not about to purchase pride at the price of regret.

Cork took charge, always a spiriting sight. He stood there, casting a long shadow in the cloudless moonlight, stroking his barba. In the snap of a few seconds he moved.

"Major, I'll need eight stout soldiers under my direct orders. Keep these sailors and their Captains on hand, just in case." He then took the assigned soldiers aside and, having instructed them, sent them off at double-step.

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"Now," he said, returning to us, "two more messengers will serve our needs. Have them fetch Captain Fuller, the Portmaster, Mr. and Mrs. Plunkett, and innkeeper Merton, telling them they can be of some assistance to me."

"What about Ebenezer Cutler?" I asked.

"I'm sure that stout member of the Covenant of the Cleansed is among the witch-triers within."

"He is that," Tell confirmed, "and his brother Amos, as well. He's the Pastor."

"Indeed," Cork mused. "A learned man, I assume?"

"Yes, quite."

"Well, let us knock on their gates and stir up the dust and cobwebs of this mystery."

When I finally make him a wealthy man, I am going to suggest to Cork that he enter the ambassadorial service, for his display of tact and courtesy is unparalleled. And when you consider that beneath it all is a fox-quick mind, you have the makings of a shrewd negotiator.

Amos Cutler was an older version of his brother, and as frost-like in countenance. Cork palavered with him for several minutes at the church door before persuading the man that we should be allowed to enter. His most telling point was that any trial must be open to the public, and that the defendant had a right to counsel, Cork being the counsel by virtue of his being a Justice of the Peace in our home colony of Connecticut. He has told that lie several times in the past, but never before in a church.

The congregation, which numbered some sixty-odd, sat in pews, women to the left, men to the right. At the front of the church was a simple pulpit and, before it, a long table with chairs placed behind. Off to the right sat the withered old hag, who stared into nothingness, unmindful of her surroundings.

We followed the Reverend Cutler to the table and were offered seats. The Pastor explained to his flock that he concurred with Cork that any trial should be open. "Let the record show that we have nothing to hide."

There was much murmuring which quieted down and then started again when Mr. and Mrs. Plunkett, Captain Fuller, and innkeeper Merton were ushered in and seated at the rear. The witch trial was in session, and Cork was smirking again.

The Pastor arose and read a list of charges that ran the gamut of all we had heard before. Various people were called to give tes-

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timony about having seen the girls near the alley, about crops failing, about cattle dying, and all manner of catastrophes—and all of it attributed to the pitiable old woman sitting in the corner.

Cork did not challenge them, but merely took swigs from a flask that Merton had brought forward just before the proceedings began. The Captain told the Pastor it was medicine for his rheumatism. That was the second lie he had told in a house of worship, and I found myself checking the rafters for a sign of imminent collapse.

The last witness called was Ebenezer Cutler, who swore he had seen the Derby twins near the alley the night they disappeared. When he finished, he rose from the witness chair, and Cork finally spoke.

"A question, sir, if you will," he said, and the chandler reseated himself. "You were the master of the vessel *Queen of Prussia*, owned under charter by the Covenant?"

"Yes, but what has this to do—"

"Pray, sir, a mere point of curiosity. I have learned that on several occasions you have offered to buy the widow Weymore's house and property."

"I am a man of commerce, sir, and often deal in property."

"As we all do. My point is that you have something to gain if this poor wretch is convicted, for I am sure you would have first bid, owing to your stature in the community."

"That is preposterous, and I repeat—what has this to do with the missing children?"

"Ah, there's that word again—'children.' A girl of fifteen, sir, is nubile, a woman of marrying age. To give them infant status beclouds the issue. And I might add, comely women at that."

A woman in the back sobbed into her hands—obviously one of the distraught parents who considered that Cork was being exceptionally cruel.

"Are you suggesting that I had anything to do with their disappearances?" Cutler snarled.

"Indirectly, yes."

A gasp went up from one and all, and Cutler turned purple with rage. "The Major's men have turned over every stick and stone and peeked and poked into everything that has left my shop. *There's* your culprit"—he pointed to the widow—"the she-devil! Ask the Major what he found in her house!"

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"Yes, I have seen them. In fact, they sealed the case for me. Let me test your memory, sir. What happened in your life on the seventeenth of May, 1732?"

Cutler's purple rage gave way to bloodless white. "I don't know what you are talking about."

"Come now, Mr. Cutler. Such a harrowing experience would never be wiped from the mind. On that day the *Queen of Prussia* was in the thirty-sixth longitude at the twenty-fifth latitude, not the 20° and 45° heading your logbook shows. Don't be startled, sir, I have proof. The true reading would put you just south of the Azores. Now why, I ask myself, would someone want to falsify that location? But the answer is clear, is it not, Captain Cutler? The Azores would be the first port of call *after the African coast.*"

If Cutler had been unnerved before, he was in complete crumble now. His hands trembled and his breathing came heavy.

"I think I have the thread of it from the scant words I was able to raise from your doctored log. You were a slaver, Captain Cutler, a dealer in captive black flesh, and to me, no better than a jackal."

Tears were coming down Cutler's face as he spoke. "I have atoned these long years in prayer and piety. We were starting the middle passage with forty blackamoors below. Somehow they panicked and got free and were all over the ship like locusts. My first mate was struck down, and a dozen of the slaves jumped overboard. Then, may God help me, when we had the remaining ones under control, they started to commit suicide by horrible means."

There were moans from the congregation and cries to have him stop. Cork looked at the assemblage with scorn.

"What else would a frightened, terrified animal do?" he roared. "Ripped from their homes and villages and marched hundreds of miles to the sea to be stocked in pens until the ships arrived. And then locked aboard like cattle for the middle passage, that infamous run of ocean between Africa and the Sugar Islands of the West Indies where their backs were broken in the canefields. All of you look shocked and horrified, but I'll have none of it! Slaves are sold for molasses, and molasses is made into rum, which in turn, is used to buy more slaves. Where did you think the molasses came from for the rum works in your town? And where do you think the rum went? You closed your eyes, all of you, and enjoyed

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the prosperity that the trade produced. I am sickened by the lot of you!"

Usually he is play-acting in these circumstances, but not this time. His emotions were at full sail.

"Then, after this horror on May 17, this fiend tries to blot out the past. The log is altered and the ship berthed for good. I don't call that atonement, sir!"

Major Tell cleared his throat almost out of embarrassment and said, "There are people who share your views on slavery, Captain, but there is nothing illegal in it. We still have the missing-girls problem and the question of the paraphernalia found at the witch's house—"

"Major, you make noises like a blatherskate. The items found in the house are souvenirs from Weymore's trips to Africa. They were religious articles to their rightful owners. Perhaps that's why Cutler wanted to buy the Weymore house. He wasn't sure that his dead first mate hadn't left some damaging evidence or papers behind him."

"But our children," a woman moaned from one of the forward pews. "What has become of our babies?"

"I am coming to that, madam. When I saw this case clearly, I said to my associate that there were two crimes, one punishable by law and the other by irony. Oaks, will you have the sergeant bring in what I sent him for?"

I went to the door and opened it. To my surprise the squad of men had a large barrel with them that they carried into the church and put down at the head of the center aisle.

"Senora Plunkett," Cork called out to the rear of the church, "this container bears the mark of your shop. Have a care, woman, there are soldiers behind you." He called for a prying bar and another uniformed man brought one forward and opened the lid.

"Ah, head chesse," Cork said, looking in and taking a cut with his knife. He tasted it. "Not bad, but a bit too sweet for my palate. It seemed strange to me, Senora, that although a pox had destroyed the local meat supply, and only recently you had started to use game animals, how then you were able to provision ships. But now I think I know where your new supply came from."

There was a shriek from one woman, followed by another, and still another. In seconds the horror of the statement rippled through the entire congregation, which now was awash in tears

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and wailings. I felt a catch in my own throat, for I had eaten food at the Plunkett shop.

"Oh, Lord in heaven," the Reverend intoned. "Oh, God! Not the flesh of our children!"

"Stop it, all of you!" Cork's voice thundered, and silence ensued. He then reached into the barrel with both hands and lifted up what appeared to be a two-foot-deep basin. It was a false top, and the barrel area beneath was empty.

"Smugglers soon learn the ways of contraband agents, Major, and this is an old trick, but a well-kept one. A soldier might jab a sack with a rifle butt or probe a container of dry beans with his sword. But no spotlessly uniformed redcoat would dirty himself or his gear digging around in head cheese. Are the twins all right, Sergeant?"

"A bit groggy, sir, when we took them out of the false-topped barrels aboard the *Lady of Castile*. They had been drugged, as you guessed."

"You have the Captain in custody?"

"Yes, sir, outside."

"You mean the Derby twins are safe?" The Reverend folded his hands. "Thank Jehovah!"

"And where are the others?" a man shouted.

"I said a crime punishable by irony, sir. By now I am sure those fair-haired ladies are the pride and joy of some sultan's seraglio. The slave trade works two ways, although the girls' fate will be far better, I am sure, than that of the black souls you delivered to the swamps of the Indies. Senora Plunkett does not look in a confessional mood, but I'm certain she has connections in her native Azores to make the transfer to the slave markets of the Levant. Perhaps you recognised the *Queen of Prussia* when you arrived here to set up shop, and saw no evil in doing exactly what this town had done, but in reverse. Keep your silence, madam, I'm sure the Captain of the *Lady of Castile* will want to escape the hanging string. Come, Oaks, I want to leave this unclean place."

Around eleven that night Tell joined us in our rooms for a late supper. He was quite cowed by his blundering, and was solicitous to Cork.

"When did you get on to it, Captain?"

"The missing girls? That could have been solved easily enough. What intrigued me was the closed-down rum works, the ship that

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didn't go to sea, and a town that had isolated itself for a number of years and yet was as prosperous as any busy port. That's why I assured myself that no ship would leave here until I had time to work out the problem. To make sure one didn't slip away, I had you bring the crews ashore. The sergeant got no trouble from the skeleton crews left behind. The palimpsest gave us our answer. By the by, I said Cutler's crime was punishable only by irony, but it is illegal to alter a ship's log, and I hope you will bring it to the Admiralty's attention."

"I will indeed. But why did he keep accurate records in the first place?"

"He would have to protect himself from inspection in foreign ports or if stopped on the high seas by a British navy ship. It is legal, as you said, to carry slaves, but it had better square with the log."

"And the other girls are lost forever?" I asked.

"Damnation, now you are doing it, Oaks," he snapped. "In the Middle East they would be almost old ladies, but still desirable, I'm sure. Tell could check the Portmaster's records to trace all ships that called here in the last six months, but it will be a futile task. The price for white slaves is truly handsome, and would tempt a merchantman's master, but he would cover his tracks, to be sure. Have another lobster, Major."

"I haven't any appetite after your suggestion of cannibalism, Captain."

"I just wanted to rub their noses in horror—a small gesture to some poor souls now in the Indies. Oh, yes, Oaks, it occurs to me that you might try to expunge your erroneous dates from your account book. Just strike them out, lad. It may not be neat, but it's more in keeping with nature."

"It goes against my grain, sir."

"Well then, take solace in the philosopher who tells us rightly that the lightest act leaves at least a trace of stain behind it—a lesson this town learned, I'm happy to say, at my hands. Try the brine and vinegar, Major, it has a fine smack."

I sat there and shook my head. Here he tells us that one of his "suspicions" was a 50-tonner that sat idle at anchor. How about a six-foot-sixer who does the same thing? The brine and vinegar dip, by the way, is dreadful, and I'm sure it would stain your innards.

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A short short-short . . . murder in miniature—and a delicious petit four . . .

A THYME TO LIVE

by NANCY WEBER

One fine spring day at the Chez Moi restaurant, Pierre Dancu, the owner and chef, took a cleaver to the pearl-strung throat of a patron who had demanded *sauce hollandaise* for her asparagus *hors d'oeuvre.*

"Her life to save their lives!" the mustached restaurateur shouted as the police led him away. "She wanted to drown my precious *asperges* that I had flown in from Belgium only this very morning! She wanted to sully their white purity with that unspeakable bourgeois yellow sauce! And she was fat—*nom de dieu,* she was fat! Her life to save their lives any day!"

The Belgian asparagus grower and a famous restaurant critic wearing a hat with real fruit on it pleaded passionately in Danou's defense, but the jury found him guilty and he was sentenced to be hanged.

The day before he was due to depart this life the chaplain popped into his cell to cheer him on, Danou would have none of it.

"Consider the wise words of Ecclesiastes, my son," the chaplain crooned. "To every thing there is a season—a time to live and a time to die—"

Danou jumped up as though stung by all the honeybees in Provence. But he was smiling!

"Father!" he cried out, hugging the startled cleric. "I think, *grace à dieu,* you have saved me the life!"

It was a still jubilant Danou who greeted the warden an hour later.

"I've come," the warden said with much solemnity, "to ask you what kind of grub you want for your final repast."

Danou beamed and beamed. "I was hoping that was what this *visite* was about," he said. He patted his cot hospitably. "Sit down, my good man, sit down, and do you have a pencil and paper?"

"Not to worry," said the warden, still standing. "I ain't mixed

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up an order yet. You tell me you want your steak rare, you get it rare."

"As you wish," Danou said amiably. "But first let me make a certainty. I may order anything I desire, is that not right?"

"T-bone, lobster—you name it," the warden said. "This state don't chintz a man in his final hour."

"That is a consoling thought," Danou said. "Very well then. I wish to begin with a *pâté* made from fresh deer liver and *parfumé* with thyme and juniper, a recipe for which you can obtain from the man who has succeeded me at Chez Moi. Perhaps he will even be kind enough to create it for you. It is to be served surrounded by the *délicieux* French pickles known as *cornichons* and accompanied by a generous serving of toasted French bread. The toast must be thin and hot, and please, as you would say, do not chintz! It is very *ennuyant* to have an insufficiency of toast with one's *pâté*. With that I will drink a swallow of Buffalo grass vodka, so conducive to the appetite. Then I will have—"

"Whoa there," said the warden, holding up his hand. "Maybe over there in France you got hot and cold running venison, but there ain't no legal way to get a fresh deer liver in this state for another five months."

"Precisely," Danou said. "For the fish course, I should like the roe of the Farmington River shad from the beautiful state of Connecticut. I believe the season has just terminated, but it will come around next year and the next, *n'est-ce pas*? With that I should like a half bottle of the delectable 1961 Chateau Yquem at its very peak, which my vintner tells me will be 1981. Then I will have—"

The warden sat down.

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a NEW short story by

FLORENCE V. MAYBERRY

It started in a Jewish restaurant on Geary Street, in San Francisco—just a chance meeting. It continued in warm and lovely Haifa, in Israel, on October 6, 1973, the Day of Atonement. It ended after the Yom Kippur War . . .

TILL THE DAY I DIE

by FLORENCE V. MAYBERRY

Everyone calls me handsome. Great, just great. Except for one thing. I'm a girl, and girls aren't keen on being called handsome. Well, maybe girl is stretching it, I can see what you're thinking. So I'm a woman. But neither are women keen on "handsome" as an adjective applied to themselves.

Everyone is right, of course. I'm not pretty, I'm handsome. Or I was. A handsome, big-boned, robust horse of a girl aged 37. Only now about all that's left of that is "big-boned." Right now I could be any age from 45 to 60.

My mother always told me I was brainy and insisted that nothing else really mattered in the long run. That of her three children, all the brains went to me. The other two were boys. Big, handsome, robust fellows girls were crazy over. They didn't need brains. Neither did other boys—boys were definitely not crazy over me and my brains.

This gets to a girl. She broods about it, can't sleep nights for worrying that no man will ever want to marry her. She hides in the ladies' room at school dances, tosses out sarcasms as a coverup, chooses a girls' college where her brains will look good. Gets back at men later on by shoving them out of her brainy way toward success. Grabs a position usually held by men. In my case, West Coast representative for a big dress manufacturer, with a crew of male salesmen under me. Buys a hefty chunk of stock in

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the company so she'll never get fired—old-age security. Dresses like a million. Why not? Clothes at discount, and a lot of them free.

You do it long enough, you finally get to liking being alone. Or so I told myself. Independent. Go to opera any time I felt like it, consult nobody. Tired of opera? So go to a movie, two in one night if I wanted. Longing to see plays in New York? You've got the money, so fly there, see some plays, your company will get the tickets, look over the lines in the factory, pass on a few ideas from the West Coast to the designers, fly back to Los Angeles, go to a movie, maybe two in one night. A real ball, hip hip hurray!

Ball—that reminds me. No dancing for me. Like some of the boys at high school cracked, I looked better on a football field than on a dance floor. You think that doesn't hurt? Doesn't stay with you? You may forget the words but the feeling about them sticks around—forever.

Sure, I had some dates. Not a lot, but some. With the men acting like they were doing me a favor when they tried to rough me up. "Let yourself go, you need it, honey." Being robust came in handy then. After all, I didn't get to be boss of a crew of smart, tough salesmen by grabbing at scraps like a stray dog. A little of that and I picked up another description besides handsome. My name is Rebecca Winston. You'll recognize the beautiful appropriateness of what they hung on me—"King Kong Becky."

Although I lived in Los Angeles, I spent a lot of time in San Francisco, checking my northern territory. Up in Portland and Seattle, too, but mostly in San Francisco. I always liked that town. I wasn't so lonely there because it's a city where everybody seems alone, minding his own business. It left me at ease, just one of a crowd of loners. Had good shows too. That night when I first met Shlomo I had gone to a play. Good New York cast, real drama, made me fight not to be weepy. Tenderized some of my put-on toughness.

After the play it seemed too early to go back to my hotel room. So I turned into a terrific Jewish restaurant on Geary Street, just down from the theater. Sat at the counter instead of going to a table to be by myself—tears were still too close to be alone—and ordered a hot pastrami sandwich.

A tall heavy-shouldered man with pale tan curly hair and clear blue eyes came in and sat beside me. No compliment to me—it was the only chair left at the counter, the place was crowded after

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the shows. My sandwich came and I took a couple of bites. "It is good?" this man asked, pointing to the sandwich.

It is good. Oh, boy, I said to myself, how corny can you get. A would-be Johnny-boy to be put down.

"Why wouldn't it be?" I said. "It's pastrami and this is the best kosher restaurant in town. Of course it's good."

"This?" He was pointing at the menu. "Hot pastrami?"

I took another bite, nodded, then looked away.

"Excuse me," the man said. "I must sound foolish. But where I have been living in Israel we don't have these same foods. I am recently in America. Excuse me, please."

I turned, looked at him again. Those eyes, so blue, like Paul Newman's in a color movie. Tan curls crisp and clean. Tan skin, too, browned by the sun. Well dressed. But what got to me was his quizzical, humoring smile. Like my father used to smile when I was stubborn about something and he thought I was funny and cute. My father was the only man who ever thought I was cute, and I used to do silly things on purpose to get him to smile at me that way. This stranger's smile brought my father, long dead, right back to me. Honest to God, in my thirties and suddenly I was about twelve, wanting to climb on my father's lap. Or bawl, knowing I would never climb on his lap again, or be bucked up about brains by my mother who was gone too. My handsome dumb brothers married, involved with their families. Me all alone, no lap to sit on.

"Israel?" Just to say something. "I thought Israel had—well, Jewish things. This is a Jewish restaurant."

His smile broadened. "Jewish things we have, but hot pastrami sandwiches out in the desert where I've been working, we haven't got." He sighed, his smile becoming gently mocking. "Israel is not luxurious. We are progressive, but in many ways we live on the edge of austerity. But now, while I am here, I will be luxurious and eat hot pastrami sandwiches."

I nodded, swallowed the lump in my throat with a sip of coffee. His sandwich came. "Delicious," he agreed. "But to me Israel's felafels match it. A felafel is our sandwich, an Arab sandwich actually, but Israel has adopted it. So good. Made with Arab bread—*pita* it is called, round and flat. The bread is split to make a pocket and filled with delicious things."

A good safe subject for a man and a woman to talk about. Sandwiches. Fascinating.

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"I'm here on business. I have only been here a month. A few more months and I will return to Israel. Not to the desert this time. This time to Haifa."

"I'm here on business too," I said. "From Los Angeles. A few days and then home for me."

I embarrassed myself. Throwing out a red carpet for companionship. He didn't hesitate, he moved right onto the red carpet. "If you would permit, I would like to share those few days with you. Hopefully to amuse you, and to make my few months in America memorable. Forgive me if I seem forward, but I have little time. I am far from home, only scientists as acquaintances, and no one should talk only about work."

He laughed uncertainly. "See. I laugh before you laugh. How do you say it here, a line? Yes, the big fat stranger gives a line, aren't you going to laugh?"

Not fat. Big-boned, robust. On men that looks good. "Lines aren't laughable, they're boring. Is it a line? Do you have a wife here in San Francisco—or one in Israel—wondering what you're doing?"

The up lines of his face turned down, that upside-down sad look that seems uniquely Jewish. "My wife is dead. From a bomb in a Jerusalem market. She is dead. And my children died with her. A little son not yet born, never to be seen by me in this world."

Watch it, Becky, I warned myself, *you've been played for sympathy before.*

"I'm sorry."

"And you, do you have a husband waiting in Los Angeles?"

I shook my head. "No husband."

"Good. I'm happy, because then you may spare a little time to me. But sorry also. Because a beautiful girl should have a husband to protect her. And sons and daughters to look like her, strong beautiful children. But perhaps you do have children. In America there is so much divorce. Or possibly you are a widow?"

"No children. No husband, divorced or otherwise." Go ahead, tell this nice man who called you beautiful the awful truth. "I've never been married. Not even engaged." *Idiot! Blabbermouth!*

"Good, good," he said briskly. "So no fiancé waits for you in Los Angeles, and you could spare those days. Or at least one, yes?"

That's how it began with Shlomo and me. Shlomo Bachmeier, he told me, and I gave him my name. We sat a long time at the counter, talking almost hungrily, as though making up for all the

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time of our lives we hadn't known each other. He was plainly homesick for his homeland. "Born there?" I asked. "A Sabra?"

"No. I was ten when we came to Israel. 1946. My parents sent me out of Germany to relatives in England when I was only two, they knew trouble was coming. They remained in Germany with two older sons, much older, I was born late in their lives. My parents endured. They were strong and wise. The sons, they were strong too, but reckless. They did not endure. So finally my parents brought me, their remaining child, to Israel so I should be happy. Now it is my job to keep them happy."

His work? Scientific. Research. He wouldn't say much about it. It was his parents and Haifa he talked about. Haifa, a queen of a city spilled over Mount Carmel, dipping her feet in the Mediterranean Sea. When one looked from the mountain top, where he planned to live with his parents, one could glimpse Old Akka across the bay in the distance and watch the great ships steam into port. Deep wadis, rich with trees, burrowing into Mount Carmel to form smaller mountains out of the one. A lovely land, Eretz Israel.

"It must feel good to love a place that much," I told him. "I never have. My family moved a lot—my parents, I mean—until just before they died, and by then it was too late for me to get roots. And business had kept me moving—New York, Chicago, Seattle, New York, California. I don't belong anywhere." I had the maudlin urge to add, "Or to anyone." The truth was, I didn't care about not belonging anywhere. It was the "anyone" I cared about.

"But California should be good to belong to. It is much like Israel. Sea, tan land, green trees. Why don't you belong here?"

Watch it, Becky, keep up the tough, self-sufficient act, just shrug your shoulders. If you talk you'll blubber. What's the matter with you tonight?

"People make a land belong, you should find people to help make this land yours. As I have. My wife is gone but I have many people in Israel. My parents, my aunt and uncle I lived with in England. Other relatives, so many, you should see us on Holy Days when we gather around the table. It is beautiful, warm and loving. Israel is a family place. Jews are a family people."

"You must miss being married though. Even with family."

"I'll marry again," he said matter-of-factly.

I fiddled with a bread crust, afraid to look up. Reminding myself, *Fool, he isn't meaning you. Men don't marry you.*

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We noticed that the waitress was getting nervous, with the restaurant still filling up, so we left. Shlomo walked with me to my hotel. It was pleasant to note that he topped my five feet nine by a good three inches. A heavy man but not fat, only a little thick in his middle. Big-muscled shoulders. A few years older, I judged, than I was. A man just right. *Watch it, Becky, nobody falls in love this fast, you're just eager, snatching at a last hope.*

Before he said good night and walked away it was all arranged. Dinner and theater the following night. The night after that could take care of itself. It did. Fisherman's Wharf, and a stroll through Ghiradelli Square. And the next night?

"Not tomorrow night, Shlomo, I can't. I leave for Los Angeles tomorrow afternoon. Business appointments. You'll have to do Chinatown by yourself."

"It isn't Chinatown I am thinking about. I want to be with you, Rebecca, I don't want you to leave. Did you know Rebecca is a beautiful Jewish name? It fits my tongue so well, I love to say it. Rebecca, could you stay? One more day? Now that I've found you, even the idea of your going makes me lonely. Because you may be going away forever."

Don't let this get to you, it's a line, I told myself. *Israel or California, that's the way men talk to women.*

He took my hand and we walked hand in hand into the hotel lobby. There he tipped up my face, leaned over, kissed me. "I don't have your address in Los Angeles," he said. "How will I find you?"

It seemed the most natural thing in the world to lift my hands, cup them on his face, kiss him. "I'll tell you how tomorrow night. While we're walking through Chinatown. I can take an early plane the following morning."

He laughed, like a boy with a holiday treat, and lifted my 145 pounds in a bear hug. "Rebecca, Rebecca, you make me so happy!" He set me down gently, his eyes tender. "Such a beautiful name, Rebecca. Like the one who bears it."

Later I wondered if he would think my name so beautiful if he knew it was inherited from my great-grandmother, a rockbound New England Protestant. Or if he would like its sound coupled with my middle name. Bridget, from another grandmother. The Irish Catholic one.

In the late afternoon of the next day a heavy fog rolled in from the sea. As we walked down Post Street, turned into Grant Avenue, entered Chinatown, we were encased in a gentle gray co-

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coon. Shop windows were transformed into shimmering auras of color and misty figures of pedestrians drifted past us. All the world, including us, seemed unreal, dreamlike.

Now and then we would leave the dream for the garish reality of a shop. In one I picked up and stroked a lovely fat boy doll with black bobbed hair, dressed in a scarlet kimono. Shlomo bought the doll and we walked back into the dream that waited on the street, the doll cuddled against my coat as though it were a baby needing warmth.

"Oh, oh," I said softly. Without thinking. People who live alone get that way. Responding aloud to unspoken thoughts. It makes for conversation.

"What is it, Rebecca?" Shlomo asked, anxious.

"Nothing. Just—I thought I was going to stumble."

I didn't, of course. It was a response to the crazy thought of how lovely it would be if Shlomo and I were walking, not in a dream but in reality, down this street, any street, with our live baby in my arms.

We wandered into a side street and found a small shadowy restaurant with booths made private by dragon-strewn curtains. Ate and talked leisurely. "This won't be the end, will it?" Shlomo finally asked. "Let me visit you in Los Angeles. Or perhaps you will return to San Francisco. Yes?"

"Yes," I said. "Yes, to both."

He pushed at the food on his plate, silent for a space, considering something. Then he said, "I will only be in America two more months. If I were going to stay longer—live here, I mean—I would beg you never to leave. To be with me always. But for such a short time I cannot disrupt your life."

For a minute or two I didn't answer, afraid no voice would come. But when I did speak, it sounded brisk and flat, like talking over a business deal. "Why a short time? We're not old. Life is usually longer than a few months at our age."

He sighed, as though settling into a job he had to do but didn't like. "It is good you asked that. Otherwise I might not have told you. Because I don't want to. But I like you too much—I love you—not to be honest with you. You are not a Jew. I am a Jew. More important, my parents are Jews, Orthodox Jews. I told you earlier, I must keep them happy. It is a son's job to do that, for they gave me life in more ways than one.

"So when I marry again, I will do as I did the first time.

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Marry a woman of my own heritage. I will not give my mother and father more sorrow, they have had enough. Perhaps if I were not returning to Israel, it could be different. But I am. I must go back to my country and be a Jew. Perhaps not a good one, but still a Jew."

"I could be a Jew too."

He shook his head, a rueful smile on his nice full mouth. "It wouldn't be conviction, it would become a cage. I know. Sometimes it is a cage for me, even though I was born to it."

"Shlomo, it doesn't matter to me, I wouldn't let it be a cage. Shlomo, the world is different now, it's such a little planet, we're all jammed up together. Who's a Jew, who's a Gentile, who's black, who's white—the world is too small for barriers. Does it really matter any longer, Jew or Gentile?"

"It does to my parents," he said. "Well, there you have it, Rebecca. Perhaps now you will turn your 'Yes' into 'No,' and this will be the end after all. *Chaval*—in Hebrew that means, it's a pity. Such a pity. To fall in love with a girl I can't have."

I stood up. "I want to go. Back to my hotel."

Shlomo stood too, walked past the drawn curtain, around the table. He took me in his arms, kissed me, placed his cheek against mine. We stood that way for what seemed a long time. I couldn't tell if the tears were his or mine.

We left the restaurant, walked up the hill to Grant Avenue, past the paper-lanterned shops. Not a word.

At my hotel entrance he took my hands, drew me close. "It would make my mother cry. She has wept too much already."

"I will cry."

"You could never cry the same way."

It was hard to say. I'd had no practise, I never said such a thing before. "I won't ask you to marry me. If Israel and your family mean that much to you, I won't ask that. All I ask is that you love me."

After I'd said that, it didn't seem so much to offer. Marriage before I found Shlomo was a lost hope, so why kid myself that it was finally going to be mine. *Come on, old King Kong, be a regular little man about it,* I told myself later that night when I looked in the mirror.

So that's the way it was. I went back to Los Angeles. Sometimes Shlomo came there. More times I returned to San Francisco. On business, and to Shlomo.

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I suppose I bloomed. Began to look beautiful, like Shlomo said I was. Those sharp guys I worked with were on to the difference in me right away. And guessing what made the difference. "Hey, Becky, you moonlighting on us or something? Got some fellow stashed away you're not letting us in on, you in love or something?"

I could have kicked myself for blushing when they said that. Couldn't think of a wisecrack. Tongue-tied like teen-agers used to be. Finally, to get it out in the open and stop the blushing, I introduced Shlomo to them. Both of us took a ribbing then, but it was good-natured and I liked it. Made me one of the gang for the first I could remember. That is, I liked it if I didn't watch Shlomo too closely. Because although he would laugh at the jokes, his eyes would get that droop, that Jewish sadness that gave me chills. When he did that I would remember to count off the weeks—four weeks left, three, two—

Then there was the night in Los Angeles when he said to a crowd of us, the fellows and their dates, not to me alone, "Tonight is special. It is my farewell party. Next week I leave for my home in Israel."

He had been insistent that night about arranging something with the whole gang, and now I knew why. Less time for questions with no answers. Tears perhaps, pleadings. The fellows started in on us right off. I thanked God for my business training, one learns to smile even when the face feels frozen. "Hey, how about it, Becky, you going along with this big good-looking guy of yours? . . . Yeah, let's make this an engagement party, marry her off, that's one way to get the boss's job . . . Think you can learn Hebrew, Becky? And dodge bullets? Sure you can, you can do anything. She's a pretty smart lady, Shlomo, better hang onto her."

Shlomo smiled, pulled me close, and said, "She's everything."

Later, after we were alone, he said, "I meant it. That you are everything. But what I said before, I also meant. I must marry a girl of my people. Only, remember, I will love you till the day I die."

That's what stayed with me. After he left. *I will love you till the day I die.* Too bad he said that. Too bad. It encouraged me to make a final try.

I had his address and we had been writing. His letters were warm, but only as a friend writing to a friend. So I didn't tell him

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I was coming to Haifa, no warning so he could prepare defenses. Just slip into Haifa. Walk by his house where he lived now with his parents. Wait outside. When he came home from work, call softly, "Shlomo, I had to come, don't send me away, I've come too far."

Or perhaps I would go to a coffee house if one was nearby, sit at a table facing the street. Perhaps it could be the same way it started in San Francisco. He would come in, sit beside me, and it would begin all over again. I dreamed a lot about this, and kept telling myself, *No one can resist love forever.*

At the beginning of October I went to Israel. In 1973. It was early evening when the taxi turned off the Tel Aviv highway into Haifa and headed toward the high dark ridge of Mount Carmel that ran like a backbone along the length of the city. Lights clotted the flanks of the mountain, thickening toward its head that, as I saw later in daylight, seemed to dip into the sea like the prow of a great ship.

The taxi dropped me off at a small clean hotel at the midpoint of Carmel's top. I reached out instinctively to feel the air, to bathe my hands in its softness. So warm and gentle, so fragrant with flowers, that it gave me a surge of happiness. As though this were a special welcome and at the end of the stone-paved path to the hotel lobby Shlomo would be waiting, his arms held out to me.

He wasn't. How could he have been?

I went up to my room, the shirt-sleeved desk man behind me with my bags. He slid back glass doors which opened onto a small private balcony that hung above a large flagged terrace. Beyond it were the shadowy outlines of a deep gulch spotted here and there with wild tangles of trees. A wadi, the man told me, where jackals used to roam and cry at night in the earlier days of Israel.

"Now we are too civilized," he said. "Now we are very modern and build new houses to eat up the wadis. Even so, Haifa remains beautiful, it is a city one falls in love with. Shalom, Geveret," he added, as he turned to leave. "You must learn in Israel to say 'Shalom.' It is our greeting, our farewell. It means 'peace.' We wish Shalom for everyone, every day, every meeting. Shalom, Geveret, we hope you will be happy here."

So did I. "Shalom," I said.

Following directions the hotel gave me, I discovered the next day that Shlomo's address was nearby, only a few blocks beyond

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Central Carmel and its shops, balanced at the edge of another wadi that gouged into Mount Carmel above the open sea. Each afternoon, those first few days, I walked along his street, just to look at where he lived. Would leave, climb up the mountain to the shops, buy trinkets, sip coffee at a sidewalk café, brood, wander about.

In early evenings I would return to his house, hoping to see him when he came from work. He never came. Perhaps he had an assignment in another part of Israel, perhaps, perhaps. . .Then I would go back to the sidewalk café, sit where I could be seen by passersby, scan their faces. But I never saw him.

I decided that one of these nights, parents or no parents, I would ring Shlomo's bell and ask for him.

It was October 6, I remember—anyone living in Israel that year, 1973, will remember that date. A Holy Day, the hotel clerk told me. Yom Kippur. The Day of Atonement. The Jews were fasting and it was lonely in the dining room, the meals austere, prepared by Christian Arab help. I remember, too, that the day was warm and lovely, a day for laughter and picnics. Instead, when I went on the street in the afternoon, everyone was quiet, families were walking together in solemn clusters. Where to? No stores open. The synagogue? Yes, the synagogue. The street in front of it was roped off from traffic, the families were entering it to pray and weep away their sins.

I followed them, as solemn as these worshippers, hesitated before the synagogue, then walked on, into the curving side street that paralleled the wadi. Shlomo's street. Perhaps on this Holy Day—

And there, at last, coming toward me, was Shlomo. We stopped, stared at each other. Then I walked to him, arms reaching out. He took my hands, held me stiffly at arm's length, and said, "Rebecca, you should not have come. No, you should not have done this. Why make sadness worse?"

"I'm in love," I said, and began to cry. "I'm in love."

"Go home, Rebecca. Please. At once. I can't talk with you now. Besides it is hopeless. Hopeless. Now my father waits for me at the synagogue and I must go. Afterwards my father and I must go home to my mother, she is not well. You must—"

Sirens suddenly whined over his words, drowning them out. All the solemn people trudging up the mountain to the synagogue froze in their steps, shocked, affronted that the holiness of Yom

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Kippur was shattered, and gazed into the sky. Airplanes hummed in the distance. Then the silence of the people erupted into guttural Hebrew. Everybody looked here, looked there, as though one of them might have the answer for this rude interruption.

A man ran shouting down the street, scattering the people, causing them to dart into entranceways of apartment buildings. Shlomo grabbed my arm and pulled me through a small courtyard, down a dark flight of stairs into the basement of a building. "This is a bomb shelter. Don't leave it until the others do, others will come here for safety." He gathered me into his arms. "Oh, Rebecca, Rebecca, why did you come! I was trying not to remember you." He kissed me quickly. "Be careful. And go home as soon as possible. This must be an attack on Israel, it will mean war. My God, to happen on Yom Kippur!"

His face was distraught as he turned away, then vanished up the stairway.

Men and women hurried into the dim shelter and an excited scramble of languages arose from them. They peered at me, spoke to me, in French, German, and throaty Hebrew. I said, "I only speak English. What has happened?"

A young woman, with a small girl clinging to her, answered in English, "It is war. Israel has been attacked. It is all on the radio." She hesitated, her head swinging from side to side, searching for someone. "My neighbor told me my husband was called out of the synagogue. The Army is calling men from everywhere. My husband is a reserve officer. He must leave, to fight."

"A terrible thing," said an elderly man. "Calling men to kill on this holiest of days. But perhaps God will forgive. Israel must be saved."

"Will you please watch my little girl?" the young woman asked. "Please, just for a short time. I live upstairs, I want to go to my apartment. If my husband comes, I must see him."

I nodded acceptance and she left. "Ima, Ima!" the child called, weeping. I sat on a rickety wooden chair and tried to lift her to my lap. She pulled away, keeping up her frantic cry, then she clung to me, sobbing. I rocked her back and forth, my cheek against her silky hair.

In the dimness, strung tight with tension, the waiting seemed interminable. Finally the siren sounded again, long and steady. "Now it is safe to go," said the old man. "That is the all-clear signal."

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I stood up, leading the child. "Where do you live?" She pointed upward and we climbed the stairs. On the third landing she opened a door, crying, "Ima! Aba!" A tall young man came to the doorway, gathered the little girl into his arms. The young woman appeared behind him.

"Thank you, you have been so kind," the young woman said. "Please come back. We'll have coffee and become acquainted. My husband is leaving. I will be so lonely. Perhaps you will be lonely too." She began to weep. "There will be many lonely women in Israel tonight."

Her husband took her into his arms and I turned from the sight, it made the thought of Shlomo too sharp. But partway down the stairs I hesitated, then said, "Yes, I will be lonely too."

"Please come then. We will be lonely together."

It helped to visit often with Sarita and her little daughter as the days dragged on, the monotonous waiting—for what?—interrupted now and again by sudden starts of fright when air-raid sirens whined. It was a comfort to have companionship when I ran into the stuffy dark shelters. Someone to talk to instead of brooding alone in the hotel. I could have gone home—air travel continued and tourists were able to leave. Instead I cabled my head office: DETAINED BY WAR RETURN WHEN CAN.

There were those strange eerie nights as I walked from Sarita's apartment back to my hotel through the blacked-out streets. Silent streets except for the occasional insensate scream from the homeless cats that prowled the mountain. The buildings were deeper black cutouts against the dark sky, lighted only by the distant stars. Here and there a car, seeming ominous, stealthy, slipped cautiously through the night, headlights dimmed by blue paint. In the spaces of time between the occasional cars and the cat screams I seemed alone in a deserted world. Only myself left. For what? Without Shlomo, for what?

Then it ended. The famous Yom Kippur War of 1973. I sent another cable to my office: AIR TRAFFIC CROWDED COMING SOON AS POSSIBLE. Sarita's husband returned on leave. The little family became a closed circle and I was in the way. Nothing left to do but go home. I checked with a travel agency, thought *I will leave now.* But I didn't. How could I leave without knowing about Shlomo? Was he dead, wounded—or off in some laboratory, engaged in secret work? What, where? Wait another day, perhaps I'll find out.

At night in the hotel lobby I watched families on television

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mourn for their dead, those lost ones strewn over some battlefield in Sinai or on the Golan Heights. Women wailing, heads covered, bodies rocking with grief. Shlomo is lost to me. Should I rock, should I wail?

Finally I made reservations, packed ready to leave early the next morning, engaged a taxi for the long ride to the airport. I went downstairs for my final dinner in Israel.

"Excuse, please," the clerk at the desk said, "but tonight dinner is served in the small dining room downstairs. A large private party has reserved the main dining room."

I shrugged, went downstairs. Tried to eat, couldn't, left, went upstairs to my room. It was a bad decision because my balcony that hung over the patio now sparkled with colored lights from the private party's festivities two stories below. I peered over the balcony. A small orchestra was playing. The guests were singing, clapping hands. A family party, it seemed—all ages there, white-bearded old gentlemen, babies, youths, adults, talking, laughing, embracing. Everybody happy, and belonging. Everybody but me. I could have whined like a dog left behind in a deserted house.

There was a core to the group below. A man and a woman. The others circled unevenly about them, gravitating to them to hug, shake hands, kiss, then moving out to make way for others. An anniversary perhaps—the couple had a mature, settled look. But all those kisses, those embraces, surely too emotional for only an anniversary. Besides, the woman was dressed in white, no veil but with white flowers in her hair. The man—

I looked away to steady myself. My head whirled, my eyes wouldn't focus properly. What I saw was only sick imagination. I turned back to stare again.

The man was tall, heavy-shouldered. Even under the colored lights his curly hair was a pale tan. He threw back his head to laugh, almost seemed to be staring up at me. It couldn't be. But it was. Shlomo. The groom.

I crept from the balcony into my room, turned out the light. Then I moved through the room's dimness back to the balcony. My knees trembled against its low railing as I stared down again. This time I saw the elderly couple close beside Shlomo and the woman in white. The old woman was pale, fragile, but smiling, waving to someone who called from across the patio. The tall old man, hair and beard snow-white, a tiny embroidered skullcap on his head, bobbing his head happily in answer to some felicitation.

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My eyes turned back to the bridal couple, but I couldn't bear the sight. I moved again into the room, fell on the bed, and pulled the pillow around my ears to muffle the music and the voices. But the picture of the couple, already with a settled look of marriage, stayed in my mind. I raised my head, shook it to rid it of the picture. But I couldn't. I buried my face into the pillow. *I'll smother myself, I'll die.* But it's too hard to die that way, the mind may want to die but the body wants to live. I sat up.

Someone moaned. It sounded like me, but I felt no pulsation in my chest, my throat. I was numb. Except for my head. My head throbbed, riven with pain, whirling, dizzy.

I don't remember returning to the balcony. Suddenly I was there, leaning over the railing, staring at Shlomo. Surely he would feel me, look up, see me. Leave the woman in white, come to me where he belonged.

"Shlomo!" I called. "Shlomo!"

His head flung up, his expression unbelieving. Then believing. All the faces lifted, startled. The woman in white moved closer to Shlomo, her mouth poised uncertainly for an emotion not yet decided on. Shlomo looked hastily, briefly, at the elderly couple beside him, then back to me.

"Please, Shlomo, come over here," I said, and pointed beneath my balcony. "Don't make me shout congratulations after I've come such a long way to give them."

He moved toward me. I knew he would, he wouldn't want me to shout what I might have to say. His bride started to move with him. He checked her with a gentle pat on the shoulder and came alone under the balcony, his face sorrowful and patient. I wanted to touch him, comfort him.

As I plunged over the balcony, his arms instinctively lifted to catch me. There was a terrible crack as Shlomo's head struck the corner of a metal table and the thud of our bodies meeting the stone floor of the patio. Another sound as my leg snapped beneath me.

A white cloud brushed my face that was pressed into the strange angle of Shlomo's neck. There was a piercing, drawn-out scream as I was flung aside from him. The white cloud hovered over me again. beat its fists into my face, screamed Hebrew words above me. I knew what they meant. I didn't need a translation. *Murderess! Murderess!*

She was right. It was murder. After waiting so long for Shlomo,

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why should I let someone else have him? Only, one thing went wrong. I didn't intend for him to leave me behind.

My company sent over a good lawyer—I told you I owned a lot of stock—and there was no formal change. Not manslaughter, not anything. Death by accident. Crazy woman, temporary insanity caused by shock of being caught in the Yom Kippur War—American tourists aren't used to that sort of thing. Man nobly tries to save her, gets in the way. Dies. Too bad. The hero dies while the crazy woman goes home with her lawyer and a nurse.

Well, that's the way it was. That's the truth of it. I can't rest any longer with that lie eating away at me inside. That's why I'm telling you all this. You're a writer, so write about it. Not a story, not make-believe. Tell it like it is. A confession.

And put this in too—something else that's eating me. About what Shlomo told me, like a promise: *I will love you till the day I die*. Well, he died. Does that mean it's all over, done with? That I ended it?

"Q"

DETECTIVERSE

TAKING ISSUE

C. McINERNEY

Though the theft of a fabulous gem
Is a crime we, the public, condemn—
Far more personal grief
Can be caused by the thief
Who absconds with our *EQMM*.

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DETECTIVERSE

WILL STEELE

by GERALD TOMLINSON

(With Apologies to Edgar Lee Masters)

For forty years I was a fixture at Endy's hardware store,
Dispensing pennyweight nails until my very fingers were cramped spikes.
All this so that young Ebenezer Endy could soak his liver in *spiritus frumenti*
And his father Lucullus could sneak off on Saturday nights to entertain young Minnie Montez in Springfield.
But across the penurious years I built a dream
That one day I would stalk out of Endy's ironmongery,
Out of the dungeon of despair,
Into the State Bank of Fork River,
And there, at gunpoint, stuff an instant fortune into a brown paper bag.
Which I did.
Or tried to do, the day after Lucullus docked me a day's pay for sleeping in a bin of carpet tacks.
Forty years, two months, and eleven days of waiting:
Lady Luck smiled darkly.
Cornelius Rhodes, bank president, nephew of J. P. Rhodes, father of Hetty Rhodes, had made off with the bank's entire assets—six million dollars—the night before.
The dream crumbled. I acquired some loose change.
A reproving stare from Myra Lott in her cage,
A chuckle from Sheriff Berryman,
And twenty years in the hoosegow.

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DEPARTMENT OF "FIRST STORIES"

This is the 442nd "first story" to be published by Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine . . . In a detective story the author hopes the reader will match wits with the fictional sleuth—that is, become a detective too. This first story offers the reader an exceptional opportunity. "Steffi Duna, I Love You!" is a fun-and-game detective story—literally, a game challenge in which, if you play the game at the end of the story, you can have fun and also beat the story detective to the solution. An unusual first story with a captivating 'tec theme . . .

Although this is Conrad S. Smith's first published fiction, he can hardly be called a beginner. Mr. Smith has a rich and varied writing background, mostly in plays (one written for Broadway was "a one-week disaster when I was only 21, but it provided Eileen Heckart's Broadway debut"), and in television, in radio news, and in industrial films. His vocational background is equally varied—as theatrical business manager, artist, cross-country truck driver, mechanical draftsman, and motorcycle courier.

We'll be hearing more from Conrad S. Smith—you can bet on it . . .

STEFFI DUNA, I LOVE YOU!

by CONRAD S. SMITH

None of us felt there was anything particularly sinister about Simon Atherton's nephew when we first met him. What could be sinister about a tall blondish youth, overly handsome—the kind of lad who went out of style with Troy Donahue?

"Rick's come out here to break into pictures," Simon said.

"Although I'll start in television if I have to," Rick added with a lofty little smile.

Laughable, maybe. An egotistical kid who had a lot to learn. But hardly sinister. Yet soon after, the monthly invitations from

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Simon stopped coming and the ominous wall went up around him. He couldn't telephone or write to any of the five of us, and our calls and letters never got through to him.

If only we'd all tracked each other down and shared our suspicions sooner! But we had this slightly screwball relationship: Simon was the hub of our kinky little wheel, he did all the party-giving at his lush place in the Hollywood hills; the rest of us were like five spokes, all in phone contact with *him* but not with each other. And after each party we'd all scatter off to our separate tacky lives for another whole month.

In Los Angeles, I do mean scatter. My little bachelor dump was in Venice. The Nortons lived with her folks 30 miles inland in El Monte. Adam Roth camped, as he put it, way down in Long Beach, near his cubbyhole shop aboard the *Queen Mary*. And Ruth Galloway—well, who knows where a fat lonely soul like Ruth would live?

The point is simply this: fond as we all were of each other once a month, with our mutual and very special interest as the magnet, we'd never got around to exchanging telephone numbers or addresses—and that's what delayed things so badly. We all feel terrible about that now. But I'm getting ahead of myself . . .

It all began two years ago when the six of us, then strangers, chanced to enroll in an evening adult course at UCLA. "*The Development of Films from 1930 to 1960*" was the juicy bait, and every old-movie buff in Southern California was lured out of his cage to devour it.

During the coffee break one night a funny little man with questionably dark hair and a sunlamped face started chatting cozily as though we were all old friends. Adam Roth had that rare knack of melding a mismatched bunch regardless of age or sex. In Adam's case you weren't certain about either. But who cared? What did matter was the crinkly laughter in his eyes. He splashed his small talk with giddy reminiscences.

"I was one of those mad autograph creatures who haunted all the premieres," he bubbled. "The Phantom of Grauman's Chinese! And let me tell you, I screamed when Randolph Scott stalked down that red carpet and whacked Louella on her behind! That was at *Navy Blue and Gold* in 1936."

Impulsively he narrowed his eyes in a challenge. "Anyone know who played the girl in that?"

Without a second's hesitation the fat woman next to him said,

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"Florence Rice."

Adam squealed in ecstasy. "Now it's your turn, Miss Trivia!"

Ruth Galloway hesitated only a moment. Then: "Rosemary, Lola, and Priscilla Lane played three of the *Four Daughters*. Who played the fourth?"

I flicked a bit of lint from my sleeve. "Gale Page," I said.

We thought Adam would go into orbit. That fifteen-minute recess flew by on the wings of Jane Frazee, Cora Sue Collins, and El Brendel. No doubt about it, we were all movie-trivia freaks, including the long-haired Nortons—and even the older, expensively dressed man who was so far out of our bracket. After a shy start he pitched in with delight. His specialty was obscure character actors: George Barbier, Henry Armetta, Franklin Pangborn, Grady Sutton. Now there's a collection of stars for you!

Simon Atherton was retired, it turned out, with a lot of free time to fill. From later conversations I gathered that he was by nature a loner. All his hobbies were solitary—collecting fine porcelain and glassware, old playbills, dabbling at prize orchids. But once in a while he felt impelled to sample the real world outside his luxurious shell.

After several weeks of our coffee-break mania we were ripe for his suggestion: "Why don't we make an evening of this at my place? You must all come for dinner and a real game."

"Only if you invite Lona Andre and Dixie Dunbar too," quipped Adam.

Simon jotted down all our phone numbers, and so the next Friday evening found me chugging up a curved road lined with mansions. At the top, handsome iron gates opened into a courtyard fronting Simon's Spanish palace. ("Ramon Navarro built it," he confided.) I began to regret my scruffy Levis and desert boots. Three other shy little cars were there already, huddled far from the awesome Bentley and its license plate reading SIMON.

Simon had cooked up a special welcome. "Hello, Douglas Dumbrille!" he beamed as he swung open the massive carved door. I tried to top him with, "Good evening, Etienne Girardot!" Chuckling happily, he led me into a cavernous hallway. I was relieved to see he'd dressed casually too, though his tailormade jeans must have cost sixty bucks compared to my ten-dollar swapmeet pair.

We moved into the elegant warmth of what would have been the family room if Simon had had a family. The other misfits were trying to thaw out their awkwardness around a crackling

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fire. The awkwardness hung over all of us despite Simon's disarming manner and attentive bartending. I saw that each of our crystal glasses had a star's name etched on it. Mine said Anna May Wong. Ah, so.

"Two drinks and then dinner," Simon announced. "We want to stay sharp for The Game. Then at 11:30 we'll catch Joan Crawford in *Rain* on the Late Show."

Thoughtfully, he'd sensed that having a servant around would inhibit us even more. So he gave his man the evening off after laying out a lavish buffet. Over our gold-edged platters of smoked turkey, shrimp salad, and creamed asparagus tips (fresh and very out-of-season) we were finally as relaxed as though we were sipping our paper-cup coffee at recess.

We learned that Edna and Bill Norton commuted to downtown office jobs (shedding their beads and denim in El Monte, I'm sure). But how their eyes glowed behind their granny glasses when they talked of their experimental film efforts! A two-reeler of theirs had just won a prize.

Adam sighed. "I do hope you don't wallow in all those dreary innovations? Hand-held cameras, crazy quick cuts—" He shuddered. "And really, you know, erotica is so *depressing*. That's why I stopped going to new movies. I only look backward now!"

His shop aboard the *Queen* offered old movie stills, posters, and fan magazines. He didn't make a dime, I'm sure, but he was in his own personal heaven.

Ruth was the most reticent that first night, but over the months I figured her out. During her teens she must have come to terms with her mirror and snailed inward, consoling herself with endless chocolates and movies. To her great credit, though, this lonely indulgence paid off. (The movies, not the chocolates.) She was now the invaluable right hand to a casting director with only one flaw—a terrible memory for names.

The Game made the evening really whiz along. Simon gave a miniature gold Oscar to the winner, and I'm proud to say it shared *my* Volkswagen seat on the way home. I'd finally stumped everybody when we varied the game by playing it with initials.

"S.D.—female star of the Thirties" was the only clue I gave. That drove them up the wall before they surrendered.

Steffi Duna, I love you!

Over the years the movies have given me a lot of blessed escape from a lot of deadly jobs. If I ever finally make it with my play-

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writing, maybe I'll enjoy telling interviewers: "I supported myself during the Long Struggle by working as a messenger, mail clerk, plumber's helper, truck driver . . ." But till then, forget it! That's what I loved about our group. Nobody gave a damn what you did; all that mattered was what you knew.

The happy times continued that way for well over a year. Whenever one of us feebly muttered something about passing around the hosting chores, Simon always showed the quality that's so rare in a wealthy man, his great sensitivity. He'd hush us up with the kind excuse that his location was the most central. Actually, he knew we couldn't afford it, none of us had the proverbial pot. (No, not that one, I mean the one of gold.)

Simon's gilded pot was the result of his Midas touch with investments. He'd begun with only the same modest inheritance as his brother. But his share multiplied dazzlingly compared to Richard's repeated fiascos. Through the years he'd kept financing Richard in one "sure-fire" scheme after another, but by now (in their early fifties) Richard—with his carbon-copy son—was still plodding away at some grubby deal back east, while Simon—who'd never married—had long since moved to California. They rarely kept in touch any more.

But suddenly one day Simon had to postpone our party. He was flying east for his brother's funeral. Richard had died falling off a ladder from a second-story window.

When he got back, Simon sprang the surprise on us—his nephew Rick. He must have answered one more plea for help by bringing the destitute boy along. Obviously they hadn't had time to go shopping yet because Rick's clothes were flashy and cheap-looking.

I really began to dislike him as soon as he found out what Ruth did for a living. He switched on his full wattage, hopped to refill her glass, piled her plate with seconds and thirds (how could he hope to wangle a job out of her if he killed her?), and hung dewy-eyed on her every word. Ruth, bless her, was past the stage where she could believe such nonsense, so the sudden infatuation was one-sided.

Things got much worse very quickly when we started to play The Game. Now, Movie Trivia is something you either go bananas over or you hate, depending a lot on what you bring to it. Rick came empty-handed. And his youth was no excuse—Edna and Bill were just a few years older. It's simply that he had no interest in

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anything that didn't bear directly on himself or his seedy ambitions.

When it was his turn, he led us down a tiresome dead end by insisting that Jane Fonda had played Scarlet O'Hara.

"Of course," purred Adam. "And didn't Tiny Tim make a divine Rhett Butler!"

We'd all have been very relieved if Rick had gone upstairs, but he wasn't about to leave Ruth's side. Happily, he found a mirror facing his chair, but once in a while I caught him staring at us as if we were beings from another world. Which I guess we were.

Simon tried to compensate for the stickiness by talking louder and laughing longer. But we all begged off earlier than usual, just as the Late Show started. As I got into my car I heard Rick's voice whining through the night, "Migod, Uncle Simon, who the hell are Joan Leslie and Dennis Morgan?"

Several of us were away for Thanksgiving, so the next party was our Christmas bash. Simon didn't look at all well. His ruddy cheeks were pale and his eyes lacked their familiar twinkle. He seemed listless as he served our drinks. Thankfully, there was no sign or mention of Rick.

Ruth drew me aside, though, to tell me what a laughing-stock he'd already made of himself in his two-month attack on Hollywood. Directors and agents all around town were chortling over the composite photo he'd sent out.

"He spent a lot of Simon's money having himself photographed in twelve different costumes," she said. "They're all on one composite: D'Artagnan, a motorcyclist, Louis XV, a Nazi stormtrooper, an astronaut—you name it."

She started to giggle.

"But every pose is shot from exactly the same angle—to show Rick's good side. And he's flashing exactly the same inane grin. It looks like one of those paper-doll sets where kids lay a lot of different outfits over the same figure."

Her giggles were getting out of control.

"And then across the top in big bold letters he printed: RICK ATHERTON, MAN OF A THOUSAND FACES!"

Simon was approaching us, but then he paused and glanced toward the hall. He'd heard the descending footsteps before we had. His expression was a curious blank.

Rick appeared in the archway. He was now sun-bronzed, and

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handsomer than ever in a magnificent leisure suit made of leather. He favored us with a barely civil nod.

"A thousand and *one* faces," I murmured to Ruth.

Now another man joined him. He was somewhat older, about 30, but with the same general type of good looks, vacuous yet arrogant. He too wore an ensemble of shining leather. They stood there, creaking and redolent.

Since they were obviously on their way out, Simon must have felt that introductions all around were futile. He merely said, "Everybody, this is Dr. Jordan."

We were honored with another brief nod for our scrapbook of memories. Then Rick said, "We won't be back till very late, Uncle Simon. Don't forget to take your pills." And with that they rustled off.

I bet Adam's thoughts were X-rated at that moment. He broke the awkward silence.

" 'Back'? Is kindly old Dr. Marcus Horsehide your resident physician now?"

Simon managed a little smile. "He's staying here with us—not because I need him though. He's a friend of Rick's from the east."

Edna looked worried. "But Rick mentioned pills. Simon, are you all right?"

"Of course. Just a little digestion trouble. Otherwise, I'm fine."

But he didn't look fine and we noticed later that he only toyed with his food.

We were even more concerned the following month to find Simon propped up on the couch in his robe. He looked ill and he'd lost weight.

"Self-service tonight." He drifted an apologetic hand toward the bar. "And the boys left us a casserole in the oven."

It was hard to know which question to ask first. Bill Norton started.

"Isn't your man with you any more?"

"No," Simon murmured. "Rick told me he and Dr. Jordan caught Rogers padding the household accounts." He shook his head sadly. "He'd been with me for twenty years."

"What did Rogers say when you questioned him?"

"He was gone before I learned about it. I—I'm afraid I was out of things for a day or two."

"You mean unconscious?" Ruth gasped.

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"Well—under sedation," Simon said reluctantly. "I hadn't been sleeping well and—"

"What does your doctor say?" Adam demanded. "I mean your own doctor, not that collar-ad quack."

Simon bristled a bit. "Dr. Jordan *is* my doctor. I've never needed one before."

"Obviously you need one now," I said. "The best you can find."

"Dr. Jordan's a specialist in my type of gastric problem. He has his own sanitarium in the east."

"But if you've always been in perfect health—" Edna Norton began.

Simon shrugged. "I'm not getting any younger. It's only natural that my wicked ways should begin to catch up with me."

"Oh, nonsense, you—"

Simon spoke with a quiet but definite firmness. "Please. I appreciate your concern—very much. But for the first time in my life I have someone of my own to worry about me. It's a good feeling. Rick's the only family I've got left now, and I don't want to do anything that might offend—" He winced. "Oh, let's get off this deadly subject. Mix your drinks and we'll have some fun."

We tried our best, but it wasn't the jolliest of evenings. Simon tired early. We didn't want to leave him alone, so we lingered until we heard the Bentley pull in. We missed seeing Rick and his whatever. They must have slipped in the back door as we went out the front.

The next day I got a temporary job driving a rig, filling in for a guy on vacation. That kept me out of town for a couple of weeks, but my first day back I gave Simon a ring. Rick answered.

"This is Rod Wilson," I said.

"Who?"

"One of the regulars at the monthly parties."

"Oh—yes."

"Can I speak to Simon, please?"

"No. He's resting."

"How is he?"

"Much better. He'll be glad to hear you called."

"But when—"

Too late. Rick had already hung up. So I sat down and wrote Simon a chatty letter, mentioning the play I was trying to write in my off hours on the road. The temporary job was developing

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into a permanent one, I told him, but I'd be home again for our end-of-the-month shindig.

I was wrong. They kept me hustling cross-country for a whole four weeks this time. I was so beat when I got back that I quit. The money was good but what's the point, I reasoned, if it left me with no time or energy for *my* work? I decided to gamble on myself, for the umpteenth time, and live off my savings till they ran out.

When I dragged myself home from the truck terminal, I found a big depressing stack of mail. Probably all bills. I shuddered, flopped on the couch with a beer, and began browsing through the mountain of newspapers I'd forgotten to cancel. (I can never bear to throw out an unread paper. It's a quirk of mine. I always fear I might be missing that one wonderful little fact I could use in a play sometime.)

Three beers later I'd caught up to two Sundays ago. For a newspaper addict like me, even the Real Estate section is worth at least a quick glance. I love to drool over all the "luxurious alternatives to my present lifestyle." Hah!

Suddenly my boots hit the floor. My eye was riveted on a picture with the heading:

Former Navarro Estate Offered

It was Simon's place all right. The ad was placed by a real-estate agency and the photo said the asking price was $500,000. No mention of Simon.

What the devil had happened? I grabbed the phone and called Simon. But before it started to ring, the operator cut in with that "disconnected service" jazz. My mind was in a turmoil. All my vague uneasiness of the past couple of months suddenly hardened into chilling suspicion.

If I phoned the real-estate agency, maybe they could tell me where Simon was. Not so easy. The girl at Maisons et Jardins, Inc. was a haughty one.

"Our Mr. Parkinson who handles that listing won't return from his luncheon for half an hour And in any case we don't give out our clients' addresses over the telephone."

Half an hour. Just the time it would take me to drive to their Brentwood office. I hopped in the old love bug and headed north.

Not until I pulled up in front of a small-scale French chateau

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did it occur to me that I should have changed from my dirty work clothes. When I approached his Louis Quatorze desk, our Mr. Parkinson flared his nostrils. I guess he didn't like my Eau de Budweiser cologne.

I thrust out the newspaper. "I want to ask you about this."

Which was nastier, the five-second pause or the supercilious little simper?

"You were thinking of the Navarro property for yourself?"

"Oh, no," I said grandly, "I'm quite happy in the old Tyrone Power house."

(That's a bit of Hollywood snobbery: once a movie star has lived somewhere, even for a three-month sublet, it's forever after called the "so-and-so house." Believe it or not, I even know people who live in the "Eve Arden apartment.")

"I'm a friend of the owner," I went on, "and I—"

"You?" The old eyebrows climbed a few rungs. "A friend of Rick Atherton's?"

Rick. So it wasn't my lurid imagination.

"The owner," I snapped. "Simon Atherton."

"For the purposes of the sale young Atherton is the owner," sniffed Parkinson. He's acting on his uncle's power-of-attorney."

Oh, poor Simon. What the hell was going on?

"They're not still living in the house?"

"Mercy, no. All the furnishings have been removed for sale at auction next week."

"Then where—"

"I'm afraid that's all I'm going to tell you." Mr. Parkinson's beady eyes were clamped on a particularly large grease stain on my T-shirt.

"Not quite," I said. "I want their address."

"Out of the question." An airy little laugh. "Unless of course you wish to enter purchase negotiations? We'd need a small deposit. Shall we say, $25,000? In cash."

I told him what he could do with the $25,000 and I stormed out.

My first impulse was to rush to the police. But with what? No evidence, just a horrible suspicion. A man has a right to get sick, they'd tell me, *and* to sell his house, *and* to give power-of-attorney to his nephew. No, I would need some definite proof, or maybe another person to back me up.

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The group! But how to find any of them? I didn't know the name of Edna's parents. Ruth had mentioned once that she had an unlisted number. And Adam probably couldn't afford a phone. Wait a minute. Adam! His shop aboard the *Queen Mary*!

Like most locals who ignore their own tourist attractions, I'd never visited the beached whale. She loomed majestically over a phony English "village" of shops in the parking area. And two full decks of Her Majesty had been converted to more shops.

When I finally popped in Adam's door, I don't know who was more surprised—me to find Edna and Bill with him, or the three of them to see me. The Nortons, I discovered, were shooting a film about past and present transportation versus the energy crisis, and naturally the *Queen Mary* symbolized the past. Poor Adam's cluttered cubicle was bursting with all their camera gear and our four bodies. It was like that classic Marx Brothers scene in the ship cabin.

I cut the chitchat by whipping out the newspaper story. They were equally shocked. Their letters to Simon had also been ignored, and their phone calls got the same brushoff from Rick. But since they hadn't tried in a couple of weeks, the disconnected service was news to them.

"Show Rod the picture!" Adam said.

They handed me an 8 by 10 glossy. It was an enlargement, Bill explained, of a single movie frame—a traffic scene, cars waiting for the light to change, a Chevy, a Toyota—and a Bentley. Even blurred, you could make out SIMON on the license plate and identify Rick and Dr. Jordan in the car.

I was confused. "What—how—?"

"We were shooting some random traffic scenes last weekend from a high rooftop," Bill continued. "We used one of those superzoom lenses which swoops you in real close, and it wasn't till we ran the film last night that we spotted this."

"We hoped it meant that Simon's better," Edna said doubtfully. "They look so happy."

"There could be another explanation for that," I said grimly.

"You really think—?"

"Look. Rick's 'career' is a disaster, isn't it? But there's that fat inheritance! Very conveniently his doctor buddy appears on the scene to start administering drugs—to a man in perfect health. They dump good old Rogers, they isolate Simon, they force the power-of-attorney out of him—"

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"But why wouldn't they just—just kill him right away?" Edna stammered.

"Rick would, but Jordan is smarter. They bide their time. They sell the house and furniture for their *first* installment while they figure out the safest way to haul in the big prize."

"Then they're holding Simon somewhere like a prisoner?" asked Bill.

I nodded. "My first thought was Jordan's sanitarium. But this picture would indicate they're incognito out here instead."

"In a small town nearby," Adam breathed eerily. "A grieving boy and his fatally ill uncle—nobody knows them—and then one day the poor man dies quietly—and nobody will question what Jordan writes on the death certificate."

Edna almost screamed, "Lordy, we've got to take this picture to the police right away!"

I shook my head. "It's not enough. It only proves that they're still around. And no one has questioned that."

"But—"

"Let's be honest," I argued. "Aren't we a fairly crumby-looking crew to go barging in yelling murder just because our millionaire Daddy Warbucks got bored with us?"

"That's utterly ridiculous!" Adam said. "You know very well Simon would contact us if they'd let him!"

"I'm only telling you what the cops would say. We must have something more concrete."

Adam turned to his bookshelves. "I wonder if Ruth has had a line on Rick lately?" He pulled out a ratty volume. "She's never mentioned the name of that man she works for, but maybe if we phoned around—" He handed it to me. "Here's a directory of all the major studios and agents."

"Oh, dandy," I groaned. "1952 Edition!"

Adam was still miffed at me. "They can't *all* be dead and gone," he said testily. "Do your thing, Ameche."

Two hours later my dialing finger was numb, my head was aching, and my throat was parched. Nobody seemed to know "a very fat girl" (sorry, Ruth) "with lovely brown eyes" (you're welcome, Ruth). Edna and Bill were back from some shooting and Adam was cooing over some lonely old nut who wanted a picture of Nita Naldi. It was nearly five and I'd just about given up hope. Then it happened.

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"You mean that *real* big dame who works for Sam Cutler?" said the voice. "In Century City. Here's the number—"

Before calling Cutler's office, I had a good thought.

"I feel like company tonight," I announced. "Why don't we all buy some steaks and go back to my pad?"

They were delighted. They didn't want to be alone with their thoughts either. So I started dialing.

"I warn you, my digs are a far cry from Simon's, but—hello, Ruth?"

She was happily surprised. I sketched in the bare bones of the crisis, but suggested we'd all hash it out over dinner at my place if she was free. She told me not to buy the dessert, she'd pick up a chocolate torte.

I had a last notion. "Ruth, did you throw out Rick's composite? . . . Still on the bulletin board? Well, bring it along. We just might have to show it to the cops . . . Okay, about seven. The gray bungalow on the corner of Oakwood, and watch out for the broken front step."

My usual method of tidying up consists of piling all the miscellaneous debris from every chair onto one chair. But with my guests being so unexpected, naturally I hadn't done it. There were newspapers all over the joint, beer cans, laundry on the dining-room table—

Adam stared with glazed eyes.

"Gracious, we're not exactly Craig's Wife, are we?"

"Don't flaunt your ignorance," I chided him. "This is the old Three Stooges' house."

Edna steered me into the bedroom. "Stay there for twenty minutes, you slob. When you come back, you won't recognize this room."

They scurried around like three of the Seven Dwarfs while I made like Snow White. I emerged in a clean sports shirt and chinos to find the dump looking almost presentable.

Edna pointed apologetically. "I hope you don't mind. I moved all the stuff from all the chairs onto one chair."

I grinned. "Why don't you get rid of Bill and marry me?"

She'd doused the lights and had flattering candles glowing around the room. Judging by the savory aromas wafting in from the kitchen, Adam was in superb command out there, and Bill was making himself useful over the drinks. We had ourselves a

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very good atmosphere.

From the front steps came a horrendous thud.

"Ah, here's Ruth now!" I said.

All that was missing was one of us, a very dear one of us. We choked a little when we raised our glasses and Bill said softly, "Here's to Simon."

Ruth had been just as worried as we were, and feeling just as helpless. No, Rick hadn't been around the office for weeks. We looked at the composite and while it had sounded funny before, now it made us kind of sick. Adam flipped it over to read the personal note Rick had scribbled on the back: "Height 6'2", weight 190, hair blond, eyes blue—the same shade as Paul Newman's. Experience: H.S. Senior Class Play, *They Knew What They Wanted*." Adam looked grim. "Don't they though!" Then he snorted. "And did you ever see such moronic handwriting? Pigeon tracks!"

Edna's eyes widened.

"That's odd—I said the same thing myself a half hour ago!"

Ruth was puzzled. "But you're just seeing this now for the first time."

"It was the same handwriting! I'm sure it was. On a letter for you, Rod—in that mess on the chair."

"For me—from *Rick*?" I yelped. In a minute I undid all of Edna's work. Bills, junk mail, bills—there it was! Sure enough, the same immature, almost illegible scrawl. No return address. Postmarked the fifteenth, two weeks ago Saturday, the day before the newspaper story appeared.

I ripped it open as we huddled around the table. There were three pages inside, on one a note from Rick, and on the others—hallelujah!—two pages in Simon's hand. Rick's note was brief:

> "Dear Mr. Wilson:
> Tell your freinds [sic] not to worry if you don't hear from Simon for a while. Dr. Jordan says he can give him better treetment [sic] back east, so we're all leaving tomorrow. Simon is very cheerful and he's been keeping busy writing you.
> Yours truly,
> Rick Atherton"

"He was lying!" Edna cried. " 'Back east' ! That was just to throw us off the track!"

But Simon's letter provided a surprise:

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"Dear All:
How I wish we could have another one of our good evenings together soon! But I agree completely with Rick and Dr. Jordan about the care I need, so I'll do what they advise. Don't worry about me, I'm fine!

I hope these game questions I'm enclosing will amuse you. It's been fun composing them. Have yourselves a party and see if you can get all 22 answers!

My fond regards until???
Simon"

And there was more:

"P.S. to Rod:
I still cherish the delight on your face when you won the Oscar. Remember how? Maybe next time we should make it tougher for you by using first names only!

S."

We stared at each other, fighting a sense of anticlimax. Simon was okay after all. We'd let our imaginations run beserk.

"Wouldn't we have felt like idiots," Edna said, "if we had rushed to the police and then found this!"

But Ruth wasn't completely sold. "Rick says they're taking Simon back east"—she picked up the enlargement—"but they're *here*."

"Simple enough," reasoned Bill. "They flew him to the sanitarium the next day, left him in good hands, and then flew back to L.A. to be around for the sale of the house and the furniture."

"That's another thing though—why would Simon be selling his beautiful home?"

Adam said gently, "He may know he's much more seriously ill than he wants to tell us."

That sobered everybody.

Then Bill said, "You know our trouble? We dislike that kid so much we *wanted* to think the worst."

I was rereading Simon's letter. His P.S. touched me. Imagine his remembering my screwy little triumph of two years ago—typical Simon thoughtfulness. On an impulse I grabbed Oscar from the mantel and centerpieced him between two candles on the

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dinner table. Then I held up the third page for everybody to see. It was Simon's list of twenty-one Movie Trivia questions.

"What do you say? Shall we play Simon's game now?"

Adam was aghast. "Over the cook's dead body. My potatoes are done and I just need to turn the steaks once more. We'll eat *first,* and then play The Game over coffee."

"And dessert," Ruth added.

So it was that half an hour later we filled our coffee mugs and sliced the luscious chocolate torte.

We decided that I should read the questions aloud and we'd each write our own answers. But after the first five or six we paused in dismay. Had Simon lost his marbles? The questions were far too easy for us hard-core fanatics. From him we'd expected sticklers about the likes of Luis Alberni, Nat Pendleton, Halliwell Hobbes. But these—!

"It's as if he *wanted* us to get them all," Bill said.

"We're just too smart," Adam sighed. "But at least there's one consolation. We know that naugahyde nitwit, Rick, wouldn't be able to guess even—"

He stopped abruptly. The same thought hit us all at the same instant.

Ruth gasped, *"Simon's trying to tell us something!"*

"You're right!" I shouted. "And I see what it is! Haven't you noticed? All the questions relate to crime and murder. We've never done that before—that's the clue!"

"It's surely a hint," cried Edna, "but would Simon leave it at that?"

Ruth grabbed Simon's letter. "No, look! He says, 'See if you can get all twenty-*two* answers.' But he's given us only twenty-one questions. Doesn't that mean there's one more answer—a big one?"

"Oh, wonderful Simon!" Adam crowed. "He knew Rick wouldn't have the faintest idea of what he'd hidden in this quiz!"

"And Rick would surely mail *this* letter," I said, "because it tells us how well Simon's being treated."

Edna wailed, "But he wrote it over two weeks ago! What must he think of us by now? And what if we're too late?"

"That's no way to talk!" snapped Bill. "We can't be too late, we can't!"

"We're wasting precious time," I growled. So with a frenzy, we attacked the list.

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GAME QUESTIONS

1. The night-club musician unjustly accused of murder in Hitchcock's *The Wrong Man*.
2. The grieving mother of the murdered child in *The Bad Seed*.
3. The silent-screen master of horror (*The Hunchback of Notre Dame*, etc.).
4. An ex-wife of the man who played the murderous *Monsieur Verdoux*, and who later married Erich Maria Remarque.
5. Hitchcock once stranded her at sea in a mink coat, but her final role was that of a homicidal maniac in *Die, Die, My Darling*.
6. "Sam Spade" in *The Maltese Falcon*.
7. Typed for years as a cruel Prussian officer, he also played the mysterious butler-chauffeur of a mad ex-cinema queen.
8. Often a villain, but best known for his role as a Far East potentate with no dandruff problem.
9. Grace Kelly's charming but lethal husband in *Dial "M" for Murder*.
10. The insurance-investigator nemesis of Fred MacMurray and Barbara Stanwyck in *Double Indemnity*.
11. The evil little sidekick of the "Fat Man" in *The Maltese Falcon*.
12. Current wife of the man who played the murderous *Monsieur Verdoux*; daughter of a noted playwright.
13. The murderess in *Ladies in Retirement:* off-screen wife of radio Sam Spade.
14. The "Fat Man" himself in *The Maltese Falcon*.
15. She tried to drive Bette Davis insane in *Hush, Hush, Sweet Charlotte*.
16. He was "Watson" to Rathbone's "Holmes."
17. Typed as a spy and adventuress, this Hungarian blonde once sang with Nelson Eddy.
18. She mourned her lover, William Holden, in *Sunset Boulevard*.
19. She murdered her lover, William Holden, in *Sunset Boulevard*.
20. She immortalized Agatha Christie's "Miss Marple."
21. *The Bride of Frankenstein* herself.

Now we were finished. But so what? We had a list of 21 movie celebrities, all involved in some form of celluloid murder,

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mayhem, or madness. But what was it suppsed to tell us?

I gnawed on my pencil and stared at Oscar on the table in front of me. Then suddenly lightning struck. I clutched Simon's letter and read the P.S. again. I knew what he wanted me to remember!

While the others gaped at me in bewilderment, I started scribbling frantically on the bottom of my list. Then I took a deep breath and showed them the result.

A creepy tingle went through all of us. For a moment nobody could say anything. I stood up and gathered together Rick's composite, the enlargement of the Bentley, the newspaper story, and the letters from Rick and Simon.

"Come on, everybody," I said. "We're going to the police."

Note to the Reader

Please turn to the next page for Rod's solution.

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SOLUTION TO

Steffi Duna, I Love You!

(continued from page 87)

1. Henry Fonda
2. Eileen Heckart
3. Lon Chaney
4. Paulette Goddard
5. Tallulah Bankhead
6. Humphrey Bogart
7. Erich von Stroheim
8. Yul Brynner
9. Ray Milland
10. Edward G. Robinson
11. Peter Lorre
12. Oona O'Neill
13. Ida Lupino
14. Sydney Greenstreet
15. Olivia de Havilland
16. Nigel Bruce
17. Ilona Massey
18. Nancy Olson
19. Gloria Swanson
20. Margaret Rutherford
21. Elsa Lanchester

This is what Rod remembered:
He'd won the original game by playing it with initials. Then Simon gave him a new hint: Use the first initials only.

And this is Rod's final note:
First initials in the order of Simon's list:

HELPTHEYREPOISONINGME

HELP THEYRE POISONING ME

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DEPARTMENT OF "FIRST STORIES"

This is the 443rd "first story" to be published by Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine . . . a first story with great emotional impact . . .

Excerpts from the author's letter to your editor will give you an insight into the special quality of Etta Revesz's first story. She wrote: "Perhaps the best way to describe myself is to say that there are many skins in my closet, and many stories in my heart. That my hands have fashioned fabrics into garments of many moods, and that my dreams crowd the stars in the heavens . . . To be more mundane, I have roamed the woods of Maine, peered at the New York skyline from Brooklyn, been frightened by violence in Chicago schools, fallen in love in Iowa, gone seining in East Texas streams, lived widowhood in Connecticut, become a writer in California, worked as a dress designer in New York and Dallas, turned catatonics into actors when I put on plays in a state mental hospital, 'rapped' with female felons while working in a state prison system, discovered the essence of misery while working for a welfare department . . ."

If we don't receive more fine stories from Etta Revesz, we'll be deeply disappointed – and so will you . . .

LIKE A TERRIBLE SCREAM

by ETTA REVESZ

Me, I just sit here and wait until the man outside push the little button and the door open with a small click and the Father walk out. The Father, I know him since I be five, which is now eight years. I bet he never think he come to see me in lockup. Kid lockup they call it but look like real grown-up jail to me.

I look out the little window for two days now. All I see is sky and maybe a airplane go by. The bed is clean but the floor is cement stone and hard on my leg. It is the door that I hate with

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much feeling. It is gray and iron, like the brace I wear on my leg. The little square window is high and I am yet too little to see out it and down the hall. I know a man sits there by a high desk and pushes buttons for many doors like I have to my cell. Yesterday I push up tight against the door because I am afraid. I think maybe I am the only one left here. But all I see is the ceiling of the hall and it is gray and not so clean.

It is hard to sit here and see the Father leave. He try. He try hard to make me tell why I do it.

"Confess, my son," Father Diaz say. "Tell me why did you do that terrible thing? You could not have realized. You were not thinking right!"

The good Father he lean his head way down and I think he cry, but I shake my head. How can I tell him? If I tell him the reason why I have done this it would be all for nothing. So I let him put his hand on my head and I say nothing.

"Kneel, my son," the Father say. "If you cannot tell me, tell God. It will help."

"No, Father," I say. "I cannot kneel."

He look very unhappy then, almost I think he will slap me when he take his hand away from my head. But he does not.

"A boy that cannot kneel and ask forgiveness from God is lost," he say and then go to my iron door and punch the little black button that tell the man at the desk to open up.

Now I sit here on my cot and wait for the Father to leave. My leg is out straight with my iron brace beginning to hurt me. Always at this time when night sounds start, Rita come home and take it off for me and rub my leg. Her hands, always so soft, rub away the stiffness. She talk to me about things outside. Always she ask to see my picture that I make that day. It was Rita that buy the paper and black crayon for me to draw. And last Christmas she bring me a box of paints! How much I do not guess it cost, but I know it cost much.

I feel in my eyes the water begin, but I want not to cry. I look again at Father Diaz's black suit. Like a crow he looks, standing with his arms folded close to his side like wings. I cannot stop my eyes from making tears. I pretend it is because my leg hurts and I try not to think of Rita.

I decide to tell Father Diaz that I cannot kneel because my iron brace does not bend. Then he would not think that all his teaching about God and the Blessed Virgin was for nothing. But it is

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too late. I hear the click and the door pop open and I am alone again.

Soon they will bring me food. I do not like noodles and cheese. Cheese should be on enchiladas. Noodles and cheese and maybe wheat bread with edges curled up like a dried leaf. Next to it a spoonful of peanut butter which I hate. It glues my tongue to my teeth. I think back to what Rita always bring to me.

Every night before she go to her job she come by the house with a surprise. First she take off my iron brace and rub my leg and then she put the brown bag in my lap and we stick both our heads close to see what big pleasure is there. Sometimes I look up and see her eyes big on me and smiling when I find a bag of candy or a pomegranate or even a new paint brush. At such time I feel a big pain over my heart and my jaw hurt from not crying. Rita she hate for me to cry. How can she know that it is for love of her that I cry?

Sometimes when only Mama and I are home I stop my painting and look out the window. We are high, two stairs up, but I can see the branches of the tree growing from the brown square of land in our sidewalk. It is not very healthy this poor tree, and has dry brown limbs with no leaves much. But still I watch the sun on what leaves are still there. It is when the sun is low and shines even with my tree that I like it best. Long fingers of white light run sharp from the center and when the wind blows everything shoots gold and shining. It is like a sign from God that the day is gone and Rita will run soon into the room and call out.

"Pepito," she calls, "I am here again. Your ugly old sister is here again!"

I pretend I do not hear her and then she come and put her hands around to cover my eyes from behind.

"Guess who it is?" she ask in make-believe man voice.

"My ugly old sister!" I say and then we both laugh. My sister Rita is not ugly. Sometimes she have a day off and she let me draw her picture. She sit by the window quiet while I look at her and put my markings on my paper. Sometimes I forget to move my hand when I look at her. Rita have long black hair and she tie it back so her neck looks very thin. Her mouth is still but when she think I am not watching, her lips move a little and I think she is telling secrets to herself. It is her eyes that I cannot draw so well.

When I look once they are laughing and show a joke ready to be

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said, but when I look again, I feel I must weep. Once I really start to cry at least a year ago when I was only twelve. Rita rush over and hug me.

"My little Pepito." She touch my cheek. "Does your leg hurt? I will work hard and save — oh, I will save so and will take you to a big hospital where the finest doctors will make a miracle on your leg."

"No," I tell her. I can never lie to Rita even when I want pity. "It is my love for you that make me cry. You are like Sunday music."

She just laugh then and the next day when she come she say, "Here is your Sunday music for your ears to hear on Wednesday!"

I love my Mama and Papa almost as much as I love Rita. But Mama sigh often as she count her beads and wears black instead of colors bright and gay like Rita. I remember long time before, when we first come to city, Mama sing always. Sometimes she dance with Papa when Papa say about the big job he going to get.

"No more driving the junk truck for me," say Papa. "Lucerno family will be on easy street soon."

When Papa finish driving truck for Mr. George Hemfield he go to night school. When I wake up at night from the couch where I sleep because my leg hurt, I see Papa sitting at the kitchen table with books. All is quiet. Only sleeping sounds and the tick-ting of the wake-up clock and the hush sound of the books when Papa close them. Then I hear him push the chair and walk to his bed.

Carlos and Mikos, my big brothers, sleep in the bedroom. They have the big bed and Rita sleep with little Rosa in the little bed. Rosa is very small, only three years, and Rita call her Little Plum. Mama and Papa have the back porch for them. Papa fix it up and when Mama say, "What about the heat, my husband, when the winter come?" Papa he laugh and grab Mama as she pass him to the stove and say, "I will keep you warm — like always!"

"You crazy fellow, not before the children!" And Mama push his hand away like she is mad but I see her lips smile. Mama think I know nothing about life because I stay at home, because I do not run the streets and only walk outside for special days like Easter and Christmas and Cinque de Mayo when the world is spinning to guitar music.

At first when we come to city I go to school but after a while

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the stairs and long walk is too much. Rita try to carry me but the iron prison on my leg make her tired and once she drop me and the iron bend and cut into my leg. I learn, but not very much. It is hard for me to read the words and the teacher do not call my name very often.

Rita try to help. She is in the high school and she show me to make my letters. But I cannot do well. At my desk I draw pictures of what I want to say. It is much easier and soon the school hall show them on the walls.

One day the Principal give Rita a note for Mama to come and talk with him. Papa he go instead and after a long time in the Principal's office he come out and we walk home. Papa walk very small steps and not even holds my hand from sidewalk to car street. When we get to house Papa pick me up and carry me up to Mama. He hold me very tight and push my face to look behind him but I know he angry, sad angry. He tell Mama that a special teacher is going to teach me at home because they have no place for me at my school.

The teacher come but not for long. After a while another lady come to talk to Mama about budget and say that if Mama bring me to Down-Town I go to special school. Papa get mad and go Down-Town but come back soon. He say nothing and now I stay home and draw much.

I hear the pop of my iron door and a kid like me come in. He is an old one in experience at this place and they let him bring the food. He push open my door with a foot and carry in the tray. I watch him look where to put it.

"Here's your supper, Crip," he say. "Where d'ya want it?"

I sit up and look at what there is to eat. but all I see is red jello and two pieces of brown bread poked into a sauce of broken meat. I take off the square paper box of milk and tell him to take the tray. He looks worried at me.

"Look, Mex," he speak low. "Not eating won't help."

I shake my head and lean back on my cot and he leaves. It is almost dark now in my little gray room. I can put on a light. It is held away from me in a wire basket like a muzzle for a dog, but I have nothing to look at anyway. So I stand and press against the stone wall so I see up and out the window into the soon night.

In the sky is fuzzy lines of color, like the cotton when you pull it out of the box and it spread fine in your hand. Somewhere I hear a noise and the red and green light of a airplane pass my

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eyes. So small it is, like a ladybug. So far away and such a small spot, much bigger looks the bird that flies closer to my window, not knowing that night is close and he should be in his nest. I am all alone now in my darkness.

It is like the darkness that came to our house the day Papa come home from new job hunting. For long days Papa try for new job, after he come home from school and hold high his beautiful piece of paper with gold words saying he is a educated man.

"This is just the beginning," say Papa. "I am just the number one to bring home the High School Certificate. Look, kids," say Papa, "this little piece of paper will be our passport to a new life."

We have a good dinner that night and Mama make a toast. "My man, with all this education, will be *presidenti* yet!" Papa kiss Mama then and she let us all watch. Rita dance that day. She was 15 and the next one who would bring home such a paper. But it was not to be.

Papa's paper was only words and no one pull Papa in by the arm and give him a good job. Each day it was harder and harder to see his face at night and each night he have more and more red wine. At last Papa go back to his old job. It was a big truck and Papa was very tired at night after filling it with broken cars and iron and rusty pipes. Soon Mama cry all the time and then Rita stop her school. She come home one day and say she have a fine job that pay much money but she have to work at night. Papa ask who boss is, but Rita say he is Up-Town man and that Papa would not know him.

Rita sleep late now every morning and sometimes she look sad at me when she say goodbye to go for job. Always she look tired and one day she and Mama have big fight. Rita say she move out nearer her job and Mama say, "No," but Rita go anyway. She tell Mama she come every day to see me and bring money every week. The house seem so still now and Mama sit long times with little Rosa on her lap and I hear her say, "Little Plum" over and over.

Now for me the day begins when Rita come, for Rita keep her promise. One day she come and after we eat the caramel corn she bring, Rita tell me of a secret she and I will have. It is a plan to make me walk straight without iron brace.

"Pepito," Rita say and put three dollars in my hand, "I want you to hide this and every week I will give you more until there is enough and then we will visit the doctor who fixes legs."

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We find empty box that oatmeal come in and cut a hole in the round top big enough to fold money into. It is our secret hiding place and I push the box under the couch where I sleep. Each week Rita add more money, sometimes even more at one time.

Our home is not very happy now. With Rita the smiles have gone. Carlos and Mikos are big now. Carlos is in the high school but want to stop and he and Papa fight now. Carlos say to Papa, "Old man, you live on your daughter's hustling!"

I watch as he pull himself up and like a bear try to squeeze the words back into Carlos' mouth. Papa's big hand slaps out at Carlos but he is quick and runs out and down the steps to the street. For the first time I see Papa cry, and when Mama come in and ask, he will not tell her what hurts him.

I cannot sleep that night. I know what hustling is. It is the walking of the streets that a woman does to offer her body to any man who will pay. I have hear Carlos and Mikos talk when they think I sleep. I hear the names of some girls and then rough words and then small swallowed laughter. I am much older than the pain in my legs. I am as old as the new leaves on my poor tree on the sidewalk.

My pillow is hard that night and I close my eyes against my fear. It is then that Rita's face come before my mind. I see her smooth skin and the quick way her body moves and the softness of her breast. I have watched her grow more beautiful in form as in heart. I have made the curve of her with my crayon on white paper. Do not think I look upon her with more than a brother should. But is it wrong to see beauty when it grows before your eyes? Her name is really Margarita, like the white flower with the golden center.

I cannot bear the evil pictures that pass before my eyes, and I cross myself and insist to my mind that Carlos spoke in anger and said a lie. I prefer it so.

When Rita come that next evening I want to tell her what Carlos say so we could laugh about it together and she could slap his face. But I keep silent. When she ask me why I do not smile I tell her a lie. I say my foot hurt.

"Come," she say, "get our box and let us count the money."

We open the top and count it in her lap. "We need more," Rita say. "I will work overtime."

I nod for I am afraid to ask and afraid not to ask. For the first time I want Rita to leave.

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It is weeks before I sleep well and I blame it on my leg but I know it is Rita that worry me. Now I look at her more closely as if I expect to see a sign that all was a lie. Once I start to say something.

"A woman that sells her body." I stutter over the words. "What would one call her?"

Rita look at me quick and pulls her lips tight, then smiles. "Don't tell me that my little Pepito is growing up!"

She put her hand on my head and push my hair off my face.

"You do not answer me," I say.

"A prostitute." She turn away from me and her hand drop.

"That is an evil thing for a woman to do, isn't it?" I say.

"It all depends."

She turns and picks up a big bag. "Look what I brought you tonight."

After we eat the big oranges she lean her head against mine and speaks into the room.

"You must not concern yourself with ugly things. You must see only beauty and put it on paper. I do not know any prostitutes and neither do you."

She leave soon after and before I sleep that night I curse my brother Carlos and his vile tongue.

It goes on as before now with Rita and me. Soon it is her birthday. She is to be 18 in a week and I decide to buy her a present. Mama has said that 18 is a special age for a girl and I want to make it fine for her birthday. The only money I have is under my couch in the oatmeal box. I decide within myself that it would not be wrong to use some of it for Rita's birthday present.

Mama is surprised when I tell her I will go down the stairs and on the street until I explain to her what I want to do. I tell her I have saved some money and I show her the $20 I have in my pocket. She helps me down the first steps and watches me as I walk down the street to where the stores are.

The stores are filled with fine things and I move slowly from one window to the other. Before one I stop a long time and almost decide to buy a small radio. But I think maybe a pretty dress would be better for Rita. A white dress to make her hair blacker than the midnight and the white like snow against her golden skin.

Now I look for a dress shop. Across the street is a large store with dresses like a flower garden. At the corner I stand waiting

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for the street light to change when I hear voices behind me. It is what they say that makes me turn and follow them instead of crossing the street.

I do not know all of them but one boy is Luis. He is older than Rita but was in school with her and sometimes Carlos bring him to the house. It is when I hear him say the name Rita that I decide to follow them.

"Yeah, that damn Rita," one boy say. "Since she move Up Town into the big time, you can't even touch her any more."

"I hear she's hooked up with some pimp who is really rolling in clover." They all laugh.

My blood! I feel it leave my body and sink to the sidewalk. Surely the earth will open up and these boys will fall into hell! I cannot walk any more. They turn the corner and disappear. My heart is dead inside of me. No longer can I doubt what I feared. No longer can I doubt.

I feel people shove at me as they pass me and still I cannot move. Long later I take steps, slowly down the sidewalk. All the time in the center of my throat is a sore spot I cannot swallow away. Like a terrible scream that has no sound.

It was when my leg hurt so much that I stop and lean my face against the smooth glass of a store window. Cool it feels on my hot cheeks. My eyes I close tight — so tight it hurt. Colors dance in my head and run to stab my heart. My leg beats out the music of pain.

No longer can I stand the ache so I open my eyes again. There, under my look, I see the guns. Like soldiers ready to march when the general shout out a command. They wait quietly, these black snails that carry death inside a shell.

For a long time I look at these guns. Has not Father Diaz said that death is only another life? And a better one?

I move to the store door. It is glass with a wire across it, like the knitting Mama does, all looped together. I put two hands on the door handle. It is stiff and cold like a gun, I think. Down I push and shove open the door. I stumble on a mat and my iron brace rips at the rubber as I pull my leg free. A small bell shakes and makes a ringing. I walk in.

When the police ask me I shake my head and when Mama and Papa cry in the courtroom for children and the judge ask me why I kill my sister on her birthday I still am quiet. They would not

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understand how hard a thing it was to do. To lose your star when you are thirteen is to walk blind on the earth. Better this way than to see your star fall from the heavens and end in mud. Always to me Margarita will be like her name, pure white on the outside and golden in the center.

And that is why I lie here on this cot with the black of my little room hiding me from the night of nothingness and I am called a murderer.

"The Science of Deduction," in 60 words . . .

HIS FIRST BOW

by CRAIG STRETE

He studied the body carefully. There was a knife in the chest, the throat was slit, the head had been crushed with a blunt instrument, and there were three bullet holes in the forehead.

"This man's been murdered," deduced Holmes.

"What school did you attend that gave you such amazing powers of deduction?" asked Dr. Watson.

"Elementary, my dear Watson."

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ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTERY NEWSLETTER

CRIME DOSSIER

by OTTO PENZLER

CLASSICS REDIVIVUS: Two of the great film (and book) detectives may soon breathe and detect again. There are vague murmurs that Philo Vance, once brilliantly played by William Powell, Basil Rathbone and others, may again be dropping his g's and discoursing on esoteric subjects while solving murder cases. Also ready for a comeback is Charlie Chan, the affable Hawaiian policeman, who has not appeared in a film since 1949. An excellent script awaits a producer, and current plans call for Chan to be portrayed by none other than Keye Luke, formerly Chan's number one son. *Charlie Chan Returns* introduces Jimmy, Chan's number three son, of the New York City Police Department.

CLASSICS REPRINTED: It is often difficult to understand how publishers select titles for reprint. Chandler, Woolrich, Van Dine and Rawson titles are unobtainable while seemingly a dozen publishers reprint Sherlock Holmes in competition with each other. For some time now, the most innovative publisher of older mystery fiction has been Dover, under the editorial direction of E. F. Bleiler. His high quality paperback editions of work by Gaboriau, Le Fanu, Futrelle and Maxwell Grant, among others, have consistently offered the reader exceptional value. Mr. Bleiler's latest delicious offerings to serious mystery fans are *The Riddle of the Sands* by Erskine Childers, a milestone spy novel originally published in 1903, with a knowledgeable introduction by Norman Donaldson, and *Richmond; or, Scenes in the Life of a Bow Street Officer,* anonymous, originally published in 1827, with an introduction by Mr. Bleiler that is worth the price all by itself.

CLASSICS EXOTICA: Mystery readers have been aware in recent years of the mushrooming productivity of Scandinavian writers. The Martin Beck novels have been well received, to put it mildly, and Harper & Row, for instance, has three translations

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from Danish and Swedish scheduled for release this year. An extremely literate and informative (although largely in the Swedish language) magazine devoted to the genre is *DAST*, an acronym of Detectives, Agents, Science Fiction and Thrillers. If you are interested, write to Iwan Hedman-Morelius at Flodins väg 5, S152 00 Strängnäs, Sweden, for subscription rates and other information. He speaks English, some of the articles are in English, and the illustrations need no translation.

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BLOODY VISIONS

by CHRIS STEINBRUNNER

Angel Street—which after its Broadway debut in 1941 ran for three and a half years—was therefore the longest running mystery *drama* of the American stage, or so calculates its producer-director Shepard Traube, who has performed those chores once more in reviving the play in New York this Spring. Written by Patrick Hamilton, author of such psychological thrillers as *Rope* and *Hangover Square*, it was originally staged as *Gas Light* [sic] in London, is curiously placid, and yet is an evening of brooding terror so constructed that the dimming of wall-lamps and footfalls heard from a sealed upstairs floor chill bone marrow. Sparking a vogue for Victorian villains attempting to drive wives insane under the genre-heading "gaslight melodrama," it has now made a welcome return.

Why change the title to *Angel Street?* Traube recounts that prior to his acquiring the play for Broadway a British film had already been made of it, with Anton Walbrook, to which Harry Cohn had acquired American rights. Fearful that Cohn would release the film *Gaslight* and steal thunder from the play, Traube wanted to change the show to *5 Chelsea Place,* but it was the wrong neighborhood, for the play was set in *Pimlico.* Angel Street was a real Pimlico address, and became a famous one. When in 1944—reverting back to *Gaslight*—a George Cukor-directed MGM film was made, Traube balked at the "horrible" casting: Charles Boyer, Ingrid Bergman, Joseph Cotten. But it also became a classic.

Also briefly this season on Broadway: *Murder Among Friends,* about a theatrical agent and his wife unknowingly sharing the same lover (Jack Cassidy), who schemes with each to eliminate the other. The devious plot was too complicated for most critics, but the play was a return of the thriller (in the

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words of *The New York Times's* Clive Barnes, "a comparatively rare genre now"), and the billboards blatantly announced: *"A Mystery* by Bob Barnes." Melodrama news seems growing. A mystery comedy with a Miss Marple-style lead is in the works, and there have been off-Broadway revivals of plays like *Night Must Fall* and Agatha Christie one-acters. The Long Island (N.Y.) Performing Arts Foundation recently presented the world premiere of a three-act (but one set!) version of *The Hound of the Baskervilles.* In New Haven (Conn.) the prestigious Hartman Theatre Company debuted Milan Stitt's *The Runner Stumbles,* a whodunit in which a priest is tried for killing a nun. Times do change, but—*please*—let there be murder on stage.

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INTERVIEW: ISAAC ASIMOV

With more than 170 books to his credit, Isaac Asimov is one of the most famous, popular, talented and prolific writers of our time. Although a noted scientist, mathematician, historian, Shakespearean scholar and teacher, he is primarily noted for his science fiction works. To further demonstrate his versatility, he has recently turned his attention to mystery fiction.

EQMM: Do you now plan to be more of a full-time mystery writer than a science fiction writer?

ASIMOV: Well, yes, I expect to be. I had so much fun writing this mystery novel, *Murder at the ABA,* that I am anxious to write more with the same detective—with whom I fell in love.

EQMM: Who is your detective, and why will he become a series character?

ASIMOV: Well, his name is Darius (pronounced Dar-EYE-us) Just. He is a writer, 5'2"—that's his schtick. I sort of modeled him on someone I know who is a short fellow, extremely intelligent writer, wonderfully feisty guy, and I tried to make my character a sort of little tough guy. But he just wouldn't be that way. He made a life of his own almost all at once. He can handle himself in a fight with much larger men, but he's an awfully nice guy. Much better, much nicer than I thought he would be.

EQMM: *Murder at the ABA* isn't your first mystery novel, is it?

ASIMOV: It's my first straight mystery novel. I have written a number of mystery novels that are also science fiction, and one in which all the characters were scientists and the entire plot was saturated with science—it might as well have been science fiction in the present.

EQMM: Are there science and

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scientists in this novel?

ASIMOV: Only if you count me, which I don't. I am a character in my own book. Darius Just unwittingly sets a catastrophe in motion and he knows it's a murder when nobody else does. He is at the American Booksellers Association and, on occasion, talks to Isaac Asimov. Just is telling the story; Asimov is a character in the third person. Just doesn't write murder mysteries; Asimov does, and Asimov needs a mystery plot. Just tells him the story, and Asimov writes it up, with Just in the first person, himself in third person. And it's as nearly as possible as Darius Just would see it. I'm the comic relief, because that's the way Darius Just sees me. In the book, I talk to Darius across two meals, then I don't see him anymore. I felt cheated. Wasn't I going to meet him again? So, you see, I have to write another mystery about him.

THE JURY BOX

by JOHN DICKSON CARR

For all your mentor's disbelief in the element called luck, he must admit it's been a lucky season. Though we are almost halfway through the year, worthy items continue to arrive; and, despite my cynicism, I am happy to be proved wrong.

This month you are recommended to three near-masterpieces of international intrigue, each with a flavor of espionage, and the novelized account of a famous Scottish housebreaker, long unsuspected, who robbed neighbors under a most respectable mask in rowdy Edinburgh of the late eighteenth century. Specifically—

The Left-handed Sleeper by Ted Willis (Putnam, $7.95) opens with a jolt when Mark Ritchie, respected Member of Parliament as well as prominent personality, suddenly deserts his beautiful wife and disappears. He has bolted just ahead of British Intelligence, which holds proof that Ritchie is in fact a secret Russian agent, left "sleeping" for years while he attained his trusted post.

Then begins a polite if uneasy duel between Christine Ritchie, a wife forced to acknowledge her husband's defection but still remaining faithful, and Patrick Cadwall of M I 5, who must track down the traitor but can't help sympathizing with Christine.

When Mark Ritchie is seen in Beirut, Lebanon, the pursuit at last has some clue. They must do more than nail Ritchie himself; they must identify other members of a spy ring in Britain.

Aided by some mysterious source, Christine flies out to join

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her husband. Pat Cadwall pursues both.

Mayhem and murder erupt when Cadwall's trail crosses that of certain Soviet agents. As twist succeeds twist, with several more shocks for Christine Ritchie, that same trail leads back to England. There, when the heads of the spy ring are snared through Christine's own plan, the speeding story sweeps round its final curve to an emotionally as well as politically satisfying end.

Alexandre Dumas's Monte Cristo was no more intent to destroy an enemy than is Richard Silva, single-minded protagonist of Noel Hynd's *Revenge* (Dial Press, $7.95).

As an American Air Force officer, captured by North Vietnamese and inhumanly treated by some sadistic but unknown Communist torturer, Silva on his release vows he will find and kill that psycho despite any obstacle.

And the obstacles to finding him are many, since this involves politics; and you mustn't cause embarrassment to the powers that be. Though many characters of many backgrounds meet or collide during Richard Silva's saga, there's no muddle; each has his own place in a pattern of much narrative skill.

Ignoring slights or evasions, Silva stays implacably on course from his first Washington interview to the deadly moment when, after one penultimate surprise, he corners his quarry in a Paris cellar. Always grim, with few concessions to romanticism, *Revenge* is none the less a mantrap that grips and won't let go.

Some readers may be inclined to regard *The Chinese Fire Drill* by Michael Wolfe (Harper & Row, $7.95) as the most exciting adventure thriller in months. And it would be difficult to argue with this view.

Drawn into the undercover game by Margaret Eriksen, a fetching WAC colonel, Signal Corps Captain Michael Keefe takes cover for what might be called strongarm diplomacy. Evidence shows that Captain Bostwick, son-in-law of influential Senator Colville, is being held to ransom in Vietnam after his capture during a skirmish. At all odds Keefe must rescue Bostwick and his accompanying sergeant if they are still alive.

It's a task even more formidable than it seems. The title, symbolic rather than descriptive, is explained as rip-roaring action carries our protagonist through every jungle peril and out again in triumph.

Very little fiction has been needed for Forbes Bramble's *The Strange Case of Deacon Brodie* (Coward, McCann, Geoghegan, $8.95).

Scottish Church deacon, master craftsman, of genteel family and education, by day William Brodie looked as sternly respectable as any other Edinburgh councilman in the year 1788. By night he was addicted to gam-

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bling, women, and the bottle; but not so addicted as to interfere with his career as a burglar plundering at will, who had a high old time until his foot slipped.

But did this picturesque soul really die on the new gallows he himself had suggested? The author leaves this question in doubt; and, since Deacon Brodie was never vicious, some of us may hope he escaped the law after all.

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YOUR MONEY AND YOUR WIFE, by Ritchie Perry. Houghton Mifflin Company, $6.95.

Philis married!? Vastly out of character though it seems, as we rejoin the hardluck SR (2) operative in his cleverest suspense adventure. His bride is kidnapped, and it doesn't take Philis long to learn that espionage politics, specifically the KGB, are at its roots. As usual, Philis can count on little support from his boss, so with little save his own slightly tarnished skills for collateral, Philis has no *choice but to fall in with the* KGB proposal. This double-dealing mission culminates in one of the wildest chair-edge pursuits ever.

AN AGATHA CHRISTIE CHRONOLOGY, by Nancy Blue Wynne. Ace Books, $1.95.

A unique book that chronicles the works of the most honored mystery writer of our time.

For the first time ever, a catalogue of every Christie title from *The Mysterious Affair at Styles* to *Curtain*, and every novel, short story collection, and play in between is available to the public. This is the only one-volume listing of Dame Agatha's works, presenting plot outlines, character analyses, and critiques in a light, easy-to-read style by an authority on Christie.

It is an Agatha Addict's dream-come-true!

THE MULTIPLE MAN. A Novel of Suspense by Ben Bova. Bobbs-Merrill, $6.95.

The president of the United States is the brilliant, charismatic, multi-talented James T. Halliday. He is on a junket to Boston when the body of a murdered man shows up behind his hotel. The story is hushed up and Halliday becomes tight-lipped about it. His press secretary, Meric Albano, wondering why, starts digging. Another man has been murdered in the president's home state . . . another victim who looked like the president. Who were these men? What agency did they represent? Where did they come from? What was their real job? It's a story that could happen.

***DEATH HAS A THOUSAND DOORS.* A Novel of Suspense by Will Cooper. Bobbs-Merrill, $7.95.**

The junior senator is arrested and all but indicted for the murder of the dancer-addict-prostitute. Witnesses, documents and large sums of money are used to build an airtight case until John T. McLaren takes the case and sets out to break the gigantic frame-up against the senator. McLaren suspects that the legendary *El Patron* maneuvered the whole set-up, but El Patron is as dangerous as he is anonymous.

"Cooper's suspense novel has plenty of action, excitement and mystery and ends in a breathless chase."—*Publishers Weekly.*

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REVIEWS OF NEW BOOKS

DRUMMER IN THE DARK, by Francis Clifford. Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, $7.95.

From the author of *The Naked Runner, Act of Mercy* and *Goodbye and Amen* comes this thriller about a manhunt for the supplier of Touchbuttons – remote-control bomb detonators being used by Irish terrorists. Officer Duncan Howard is outraged by the terrorists' atrocities. When two of his associates are killed in a bombing, outrage becomes obsession. The final confrontation between hunter and prey is dreadful and ironic.

"This is chair's edge, can't-put-it-down mystery fiction . . . There's a stunning—meaning that it will stun you—conclusion."—*Los Angeles Times.*

"Fast-paced, intelligent, and thoroughly unnerving . . . high above the general run of thrillers."—*Cosmopolitan.*

POSTSCRIPT FOR MALPAS, by Peter Pearson. Dodd, Mead, $5.95.

The year is 1985. Britain has just developed a vast new nuclear program, headed in the north by Geoffrey Row, husband of the beautiful Madeline. When their shy, scholarly librarian, driving Madeline's car, arrives in Scotland for his vacation, he is handed an unsigned letter. Eventually he discovers someone meant to smash the program. But what did the mysterious postscript for "Malpas" have to do with it? Or Madeline's ruthless husband?

A taut novel of suspense, memorable for its excitement, its vivid characters, and colorful Highland setting against which this battle for survival is finally decided.

STARKWEATHER: A CHRONICLE OF MASS MURDER, by William Allen. Houghton Mifflin Company, $7.95.

"In January 1958, a 19-year-old Nebraskan, accompanied by his 14-year-old girl friend, murdered 10 people in and around Lincoln in eight days. This book is a sensitive, matter-of-fact retelling of that story using interviews, background reading, visits to the crime scene in the conventional manner. . . . (Allen) makes the sordid, illiterate, poverty stricken ambiance of the murders palpably alive and what they did understandable, if profoundly depressing. He is also able to give a distinctive portrait of each of Starkweather's victims . . . and to hold the reader's attention."—*Publishers Weekly.*

RIPOFF, by Arthur Maling. Harper & Row, $7.95.

A fascinating story of chicanery in the business world by the author of *Bent Man* and *Dingdong.*

"This is a conglomerate plot—*traveling faster than the eye* . . . An instantaneous, convincing, dodgy entertainment—all that money can buy."—*Kirkus Reviews.*

"The plotting here is most ingenious and even readers who wouldn't know a stock from a bond can follow the fascinating financial detective work involved in probing the soft underbelly of a giant conglomerate. The characterizations, down to the most secondary level, are standouts."—*Publishers Weekly.*

"A quietly scary, all-too-convincing thriller about white-collar crooks getting away with murder in the bond market."—*Hildegarde Dolson.*

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REVIEWS OF NEW BOOKS

ELIZABETH, by Jessica Hamilton. Random House, $6.95.

This compelling novel—combining the fascination of *The Bad Seed* and *The Exorcist*—invites readers into a strange and terrifying world of death, suspense, and the supernatural. In a mirror in her parents' cottage a vision beckons 14-year-old Elizabeth, offering her extraordinary powers of witchcraft. Later that day, Elizabeth's parents, whom she dislikes, are dead. The official explanation: a boating accident. But Elizabeth *knows* she killed them. Was their death chance . . . or are Elizabeth's powers real? This is a vivid, haunting tale that invites the reader to re-examine his own impulses and the nature of evil.

NAVONA 1000. A novel by Mel Arrighi. Bobbs-Merrill, $7.95.

Amid the old world splendor of Amsterdam and the mystical beauty of Rome, Alan Lacey, professional assassin, suddenly awakens to the meaning of his work. Lacey has one major flaw . . . creeping humanity. As he begins to care about his victims the work becomes increasingly difficult, until he's almost unable to pull the trigger. He tries to unravel the mystery of his employer's identity, and the successive victims. Is there a way out? NAVONA 1000 is both an ingenious character study and a superb suspense thriller.

"As fast and shiny as a Ferrari." —*Kirkus Reviews*.

TITLE NO.	AUTHOR	TITLE	PUBLISHER	RETAIL PRICE	DISCOUNTED PRICE
77065	Allen, William	STARKWEATHER: A CHRONICLE OF MASS MURDER	Houghton, Mifflin	$7.95	$6.35
79425	Arrighi, Mel	NAVONA 1000	Bobbs-Merrill	7.95	6.35
61597	ed. E. F. Bleiler	RICHMOND: OR SCENES IN THE LIFE OF A BOW STREET OFFICER	Dover	4.50	3.60
79430	Bova, Ben	THE MULTIPLE MAN	Bobbs-Merrill	6.95	5.50
55188	Bramble, Forbes	THE STRANGE CASE OF DEACON BRODIE	Coward-McCann	8.95	6.95
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54577	Willis, Ted	THE LEFT-HANDED SLEEPER	Putnam	7.95	6.35
73402	Wolfe, Michael	THE CHINESE FIRE DRILL	Harper & Row	7.95	6.35
60317	Wynne, Nancy Blue	AN AGATHA CHRISTIE CHRONOLOGY	Ace Books	1.95	1.55

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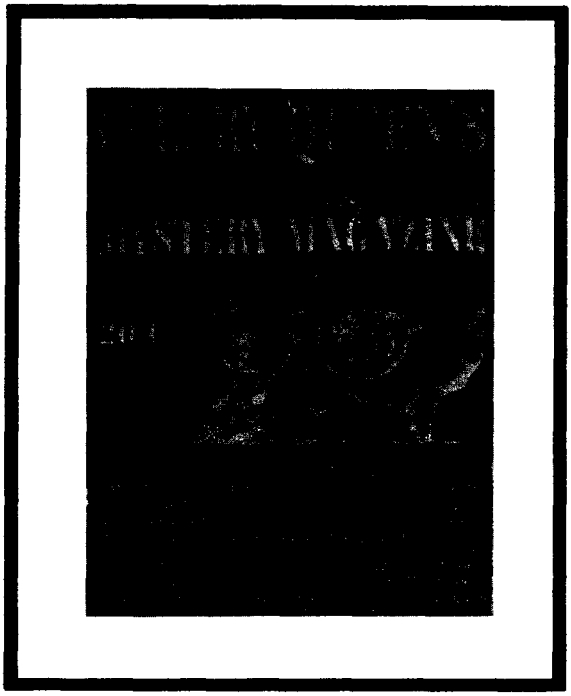

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C. B. Labrid's first story, "Golf Widow," appeared only two months ago, in our 35th Anniversary Issue, March 1976. And how satisfyingly this new writer meets the challenge of a second story . . .

FRENCH LEAVE

by C. B. LABRID

"Strange . . ."

The cats weren't waiting for her. Suppertime, and neither one pranced impatiently across the porch.

"Madeleine? Bernadette?" Madame Antoine called, scanning the back yard. She listened for an answering meow.

Her key was in the lock but she didn't turn it. Six months of widowhood had not softened the bleakness of coming home from work to an empty house. She called the cats again.

"There is something wrong—" She breathed deeply, forcing away the tiny pinch of fear.

"Disgusting!" she reprimanded herself. "One does not develop cowardice along with the grey hairs."

She flipped the key and pushed open the door. Madeleine, the calico, edged the jamb and rubbed against her legs.

"But how did you get inside? Is Bernadette there too? Who let you in?"

"*I* let them in, Berthe."

The guttural pronunciation of her name was unmistakable. Madame Antoine stepped inside, shut the door behind her.

1976. Madison, Connecticut. She stood in the shingled, beachfront house Edouard had chosen as their home in America. Yet she was suddenly returned to the Paris of 1940.

"Emil?"

"You recognize a voice after all these years?"

"It *is* you. Incredible!"

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She reached for the lamp. "Let me look at you," she said.

"No! No lights."

"No? But you are joking. You recreate our times in the underground, is that it?"

"We must talk, Berthe."

"Certainly. As civilized people, however. You'll light the fire, won't you? While I serve an apéritif." She started into the kitchen, explaining, "I must feed the cats. Have you seen Bernadette? She's the white one."

"Berthe!" He barked it. A command.

Madame Antoine stopped, stood very still for a moment, then turned to face him. "I have not had to accept rudeness for thirty years, Emil."

"Sit down. Ah, *please*. Please sit and listen to me."

She chose Edouard's favorite chair, seated herself, folded her hands in her lap. A dignified posture.

"I must have your help. It was Edouard's wish," he said.

Madame Antoine nodded, remained silent.

"Serenity," he said, with admiration. "You haven't changed, you know. I see the lovely young woman, fresh from the convent—"

"You say you want my help?"

Forced by her curtness, he altered his tone. "Edouard kept his records somewhere, his contacts, codes in use, the chain of command in Washington."

Her vision adjusted to the dim interior. She could make out the startling blue of his eyes. There was a beard now, and hair much longer than the brush cut of a soldier. As he began to pace back and forth, she pictured leather boots in the place of his soft canvas shoes.

Emil stared down at her. "Edouard insisted that you knew nothing. Our last time together—it pains me to speak of it—we were such good friends. He said you did not suspect at all. Can that be so?"

"Suspect? Suspect what?"

"Ha! That does take me back to the old days. Berthe, the innocent, the charmingly naive."

"You are being silly, Emil."

"No," he chuckled, "not so silly as the girl I used to know. Oh, we reminisced, poor Edouard and I. He reminded me of the day you threw the entire pot of *civet de lapin*—rabbit stew—at me. Remember? Now *that* was absurd! All of us near starvation, but

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our virtuous demoiselle was horrified to learn the true nature of the *lapin.*"

She clasped her hands more tightly together. "It gave you pleasure to tell me, I recall. Obviously, it pleases you still. How odd that Edouard should mention such an unpleasant incident."

Emil's grin widened. "No sense of humor, that was always your problem, Berthe. But your husband knew how to laugh. Even when it was clear that he would not leave South America alive, he spoke in jest."

"Oh?"

"He told me, 'When you visit my wife'—he expected me to come for his papers, you see—'be sure to tell her you want the girls to make a *civet de lapin* for you.' Imagine that!"

"Imagine," she echoed. "He said it in just that way?"

"Oh, yes. How that man loved a joke! I can hear him now, 'Don't forget, Emil. Berthe may want to kill you for bringing up the story,' he said, 'but my beautiful girls will understand that only a special friend would tell it.' What a funny man, your Edouard!"

Madame Antoine nodded agreement.

"But," Emil sighed, "it took me too long to get back into the country. Now I will not have the pleasure of meeting your daughters. They have returned to school, is that correct?"

"Our daughters? Yes, back to college." She stood suddenly, saying, "I do find it ridiculous to sit here in semidarkness, as though the bombers were overhead." Striding toward the kitchen, she announced, "Furthermore, I intend to feed my cats."

Madeleine's purring filled the room. Bernadette crouched on top of a cupboard, ready to pounce.

"It's nothing, *cherie,*" she comforted the old white cat. "An uninvited guest, but nothing to fear." Setting out the saucers of liver, she repeated, "Nothing to fear."

She carried a tray to the living room with glasses and a bottle of wine. "Now, Emil, I've noted the broken latch on the kitchen door, the missing fruit and cheese, the dirt left on the cake of soap by the sink. You also tracked mud over the linoleum."

She set down the tray. Lighting a single candle on the mantelpiece, she asked, "Is ineptitude typical of agents these days?"

He kept his back to the candle's glow and poured their apéritifs. "I was dirty and hungry because my only concern was to reach you without being seen. I'm satisfied that I was not followed."

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She shrugged and took one of the glasses, saying, "To your health." Then she sat down again in Edouard's chair.

Emil bowed to her toast, sipped his wine. "Deny it if you wish, but I know that Edouard never stopped his undercover activities. The lessons learned with the Maquis were too valuable to waste."

"We came to the United States and made new lives for ourselves," she answered.

"You, perhaps. Not Edouard."

Bernadette jumped into her lap. She stroked the cat gently under the chin. "My husband told you this?"

"He didn't need to tell me. The name of Antoine is a password in Interpol. It is synonymous with the eternal fight for freedom!"

"How poetic, Emil. And what about you? The double agent, the patriot who was willing to pose as a Nazi. Is there still a demand for your particular talents?"

He had emptied his glass and paused to refill it. "You twist the knife, Berthe. My field of espionage has never commanded your respect. Yet"—he saluted her with his wine—"I am alive, while your heroic Edouard is quite dead."

She carefully set Bernadette on the rug. Studying the cat as it stretched and arched its back, Madame Antoine controlled the tears threatening her composure.

"As you say, Emil. He is dead."

"I warned him, naturally, that the Communists were on to him. After Mirano's assassination they had to make an example of the American agent. Oh, yes, I warned him."

"How puzzled he must have been," she said. "I could swear he left for South America with no purpose other than business meetings."

"The most attractive women are often the most obtuse, dear Berthe." Stifling a yawn, he urged, "Now let us get on with it. I am tired of waiting. His records. Where are they?"

"Surely you had time to search the house? Your tracks on the floor were entirely dry."

He shook his head, "Ah, the little one fancies herself a detective. The years haven't taught you that men are better suited to such work?"

She reached down for Madeleine, waiting her turn to be caressed. "Hmm, a French leave, you might say, from my role as an idiotic female." She nestled the cat close to her, "What do you think, *ma petite*?"

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He repeated sharply, "Edouard's papers. Now!"

Madeleine hissed at the harsh voice and leaped to the floor. Madame Antoine asked, "He didn't mention their location to you? When you were—warning him, did you say?—last spring."

"I have no more patience with your mistrust, Berthe. These are associations you never understood. You must take my word as an old friend that Edouard would wish me to have the information, that he would want his work to continue." He leaned forward and poured more wine into his glass. "I'm sure you can find what I want by the time I finish one last apéritif."

"I tell you, there are no records. Edouard was not involved in espionage. Just as, long ago, my parents were not." Her voice barely audible, she asked, "You had warned them, also, hadn't you? That the Nazis would trap them?"

"You were a child then, and you are behaving like a child now. They were shot in spite of my intervention. You never realized what jeopardy I risked in order to help them."

"But your 'intervention' was ineffective. And you convinced our group that my skepticism was only a child's hysteria."

"Even a very young female is entitled to the natural weaknesses of her gender." He clumsily set down his empty glass. "I have no more time to waste. Edouard trusted me completely. That is all you need to know."

"Not quite, Emil." She glanced at the wine bottle. "Are you sure you won't have any more? I had hoped you'd be a bit sleepier before we said our *adieux*."

"Sl—? What are you saying?"

"Oh, the bereaved need so much medication to help them sleep. But I can end my reliance on powders and pills now. And, being a woman—and therefore stupid?—I dropped my supply into the wine."

He stood, testing his sense of balance. "You are a fool!"

"Perhaps," Madame Antoine said. "Tell me, isn't there an odd flavor? I didn't taste the wine, you see. Did you not notice a strange bouquet?"

"Why? Why have you done this to me?"

"I remember your strength, Emil. It seemed wise to insure my ability to shoot you properly." She reached along the pillow of Edouard's chair. She rose gracefully, the gun in her hand. "So, my husband trusted our old friend completely? That is what you said, Emil?" She fired. As he fell, she fired again.

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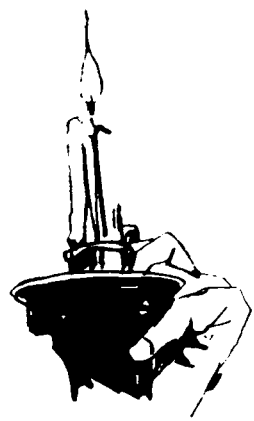
Madeleine and Bernadette surveyed the situation from the kitchen doorway. Madame Antoine spoke softly to them, "We can be thankful for Edouard's sense of humor, *n'est-ce pas?*" She allowed herself an uncharacteristic giggle. "How blithely our 'trusted friend' warned us about himself!"

She called the local police to report the intruder she had shot in self-defense. The tray of glasses and wine were put away before the sheriff arrived. As the body was removed, she sighed, "Ah, Emil, I wonder if you understood at the very last. Or was it inconceivable to you that Agent Antoine could be a woman?"

She kept the cats indoors that night. And tried to forget about Europe during the war—when people had been hungry enough to cook housecats and pretend they were rabbit meat.

Beckoning to Madeleine and Bernadette, she addressed them as Edouard always had. "Come along, my beautiful girls. We will have a good night's sleep at last."



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a NEW Black Widowers story by

ISAAC ASIMOV

Welcome home—hail the return of the Black Widowers inviting you to attend another of their monthly dinner meetings. This time writer Emmanuel Rubin is the host, and his guest is a stage magician—The Amazing Larri. And Rubin's colleagues-in-conundrums, his partners-in-puzzles—lawyer Geoffrey Avalon, artist Mario Gonzalo, mathematician Roger Halsted, chemist James Drake, and code expert Thomas Trumbull—all are ready, willing, if not always able, to match wits with the professional prestidigitator. (Good Lord, we've fallen into the trap of "The Invisible Man"! How could we have forgotten the waiter, the omnipresent, omniscient Henry? For it is The Amazing Henry who is the master magician at these mystery meetings.)

Here, then, is the real McAsimov . . .

THE CROSS OF LORRAINE

by ISAAC ASIMOV

Emmanuel Rubin did not, as a general rule, ever permit a look of relief to cross his face. Had one done so, it would have argued a prior feeling of uncertainty or apprehension, sensations he might feel but would certainly never admit to.

This time, however, the relief was unmistakable. It was monthly banquet time for the Black Widowers. Rubin was the host and it was he who was supplying the guest. And here it was twenty minutes after seven and only now—with but ten minutes left before dinner was to start—only now did his guest arrive.

Rubin bounded toward him, careful, however, not to spill a drop of his second drink.

"Gentlemen," he said, clutching the arm of the newcomer, "my guest, The Amazing Larri—spelled L-A-R-R-I." And in a low-

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ered voice, over the hum of pleased-to-meet-yous, "Where the hell were you?"

Larri muttered, "The subway train stalled." Then he returned smiles and greetings.

"Pardon me," said Henry, the perennial—and nonpareil—waiter at the Black Widower banquets, "but there is not much time for the guest to have his drink before dinner begins. Would you state your preference, sir?"

"A good notion, that," said Larri gratefully. "Thank you, waiter, and let me have a dry martini, but not too darned dry—a little damp, so to speak."

"Certainly, sir," said Henry.

Rubin said, "I've told you, Larri, that we members all have our *ex officio* doctorates, so now let me introduce them in nauseating detail. This tall gentleman with the neat mustache, black eyebrows, and straight back is Dr. Geoffrey Avalon. He's a lawyer and he never smiles. The last time he tried, he was fined for contempt of court."

Avalon smiled as broadly as he could and said, "You undoubtedly know Manny well enough, sir, not to take him seriously."

"Undoubtedly," said Larri. As he and Rubin stood together, they looked remarkably alike. Both were the same height—about five feet five—both had active, inquisitive faces, both had straggly beards, though Larri's was longer and was accompanied by a fringe of hair down both sides of his face as well.

Rubin said, "And here, dressed fit to kill anyone with a *real* taste for clothing, is our artist-expert, Dr. Mario Gonzalo, who will insist on producing a caricature of you in which he will claim to see a resemblance. —Dr. Roger Halsted inflicts pain on junior high-school students under the guise of teaching them what little he knows of mathematics. —Dr. James Drake is a superannuated chemist who once conned someone into granting him a Ph.D. —And finally, Dr. Thomas Trumbull, who works for the government in an unnamed job as a code expert and who spends most of his time hoping Congress doesn't find out."

"Manny," said Trumbull wearily, "if it were possible to cast a retroactive blackball, I think you could count on five."

And Henry said, "Gentlemen, dinner is served."

It was one of those rare Black Widower occasions when lobster was served, rarer now than ever because of the increase in price.

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Rubin, who as host bore the cost, shrugged it off. "I made a good paperback sale last month and we can call this a celebration."

"We can celebrate," said Avalon, "but lobster tends to kill conversation. The cracking of claws and shells, the extraction of meat, the dipping in melted butter—all that takes one's full concentration." And he grimaced with the effort he was putting into the compression of a nutcracker.

"In that case," said the Amazing Larri, "I shall have a monopoly of the conversation," and he grinned with satisfaction as a large platter of prime rib-roast was dexterously placed before him by Henry.

"Larri is allergic to seafood," said Rubin.

Conversation was indeed subdued, as Avalon had predicted, until the various lobsters had been clearly worsted in culinary battle, and then, finally, Halsted asked, "What makes you Amazing, Larri?"

"Stage name," said Larri. "I am a prestidigitator, an escapist extraordinary, and the greatest living exposer."

Trumbull, who was sitting to Larri's right, formed ridges on his bronzed forehead. "What the devil do you mean by 'exposer'?"

Rubin beat a tattoo on his water glass at this point and said, "No grilling till we've had our coffee."

"For God's sake," said Trumbull, "I'm just asking for the definition of a word."

"Host's decision is final," said Rubin.

Trumbull scowled in Rubin's direction. "Then I'll *guess* the answer. An exposer is one who exposes fakes—people who, using trickery of one sort or another, pretend to produce effects they attribute to supernatural or paranatural forces."

Larri thrust out his lower lip, raised his eyebrows, and nodded. "Very good for a guess. I couldn't have put it better."

Gonzalo said, "You mean that whatever someone did by what he claimed was real magic, you could do by stage magic?"

"Exactly," said Larri. "For instance, suppose that some mystic claimed he had the capacity to bend spoons by means of unknown forces. I can do the same by using natural force, this way." He lifted his spoon and, holding it by its two ends, he bent it half an inch out of shape.

Trumbull said, "That scarcely counts. Anyone can do it that way."

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"Ah," said Larri, "but this spoon you saw me bend is not the amazing effect at all. That spoon you were watching merely served to trap and focus the ethereal rays that did the real work. Those rays acted to bend *your* spoon, Dr. Trumbull."

Trumbull looked down and picked up his spoon, which was bent nearly at right angles. "How did you do this?"

Larri shrugged. "Would you believe ethereal forces?"

Drake laughed, and pushing his dismantled lobster toward the center of the table, lit a cigarette. He said, "Larri did it a few minutes ago, with his hands, when you weren't looking."

Larri seemed unperturbed by exposure. "When Manny banged his glass, Dr. Trumbull, you looked away. I had rather hoped you all would."

Drake said, "I know better than to pay attention to Manny."

"But," said Larri, "if no one had seen me do it, would you have accepted the ethereal forces?"

"Not a chance," said Trumbull.

"Even if there had been no other way in which you could explain the effect? —Here, let me show you something. Suppose you wanted to flip a coin—"

He fell silent for a moment while Henry passed out the strawberry shortcake, pushed his own serving out of the way, and said, "Suppose you wanted to flip a coin without actually lifting it and turning it—this penny, for instance. There are a number of ways it could be done. The simplest would be merely to touch it quickly, because, as you all know, a finger is always slightly sticky, especially at meal time, so that the coin lifts up slightly as the finger is removed and can easily be made to flip over. It is tails now, you see. Touch it again and it is heads."

Gonzalo said, "No prestidigitation there, though. We see it flip."

"Exactly," said Larri, "and that's why I won't do it that way. Let's put something over it so that it can't be touched. Suppose we use a—" He looked around the table for a moment and seized a salt shaker. "Suppose we use this."

He placed the salt shaker over the coin and said, "Now it is showing heads—"

"Hold on," said Gonzalo. "How do we know it's showing heads? It could be tails and then, when you reveal it later, you'll say it flipped, when it was tails all along."

"You're perfectly right," said Larri, "and I'm glad you raised the point. —Dr. Drake, you have eyes that caught me before. Would

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you check this on behalf of the assembled company? I'll lift the salt shaker and you tell me what the coin shows."

Drake looked and said, "Heads," in his softly hoarse voice.

"You'll all take Dr. Drake's word, I hope, gentlemen? —Please, watch me place the salt shaker back on the coin and make sure it doesn't flip in the process—"

"It didn't," said Drake.

"Now to keep my fingers slipping while performing this trick, I will put this paper napkin over the salt shaker."

Larri folded the paper napkin neatly and carefully around the salt shaker, then said, "But, in manipulating this napkin, I caused you all to divert your attention from the penny and you may think I have flipped it in the process." He lifted the salt shaker with the napkin around it, and said, "Dr. Drake, will you check the coin again?"

Drake leaned toward it. "Still heads," he said.

Very carefully and gently Larri put back the salt shaker, the paper napkin still folded around it and said, "The coin remained as is?"

"Still heads," said Drake.

"In that case, I now perform the magic." Larri pushed down on the salt shaker and the paper napkin collapsed. There was nothing inside.

There was a moment of shock, and then Gonzalo said, "Where's the salt shaker?"

"In another plane of existence," said Larri airily.

"But you said you were going to flip the coin."

"I lied."

Avalon said, "There's no mystery. He had us all concentrating on the coin as a diversion tactic. When he picked up the salt shaker with the napkin around it to let Jim look at the coin, he just dropped the salt shaker into his hand and placed the empty, folded napkin over the coin."

"Did you see me do that, Dr. Avalon?" asked Larri.

"No. I was looking at the coin too."

"Then you're just guessing," said Larri.

Rubin, who had not participated in the demonstration at all, but who had eaten his strawberry shortcake instead, said, "The tendency is to argue these things out logically and that's impossible. Scientists and other rationalists are used to dealing with the universe, which fights fair. Faced with a mystic who does not,

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they find themselves maneuvered into believing nonsense and, in the end, making fools of themselves.

"Magicians, on the other hand," Rubin went on, "know what to watch for, are experienced enough not to be misdirected, and are not impressed by the apparently supernatural. That's why mystics generally won't perform if they know magicians are in the audience."

Coffee had been served and was being sipped, and Henry was quietly preparing the brandy, when Rubin sounded the water glass and said, "Gentlemen, it is time for the official grilling, assuming you idiots have left anything to grill. Jeff, will you do the honors tonight?"

Avalon cleared his throat portentously and frowned down on The Amazing Larri from under his dark and luxuriant eyebrows. Using his voice in the deepest of its naturally deep register, he said, "It is customary to ask our guests to justify their existences, but if today's guest exposes phony mystics even occasionally, I, for one, consider his existence justified and will pass on to another question.

"The temptation is to ask you how you performed your little disappearing trick of a few moments ago, but I quite understand that the ethics of your profession preclude your telling us—even though everything said here is considered under the rose, and though nothing has ever leaked, I will refrain from that question.

"Let me instead ask about your failures. —Sir, you describe yourself as an exposer. Have there been any supposedly mystical demonstrations you have not been able to duplicate in prestidigitous manner and have not been able to account for by natural means?"

Larri said, "I have not attempted to explain all the effects I have ever encountered or heard of, but where I have studied an effect and made an attempt to duplicate it, I have succeeded in every case."

"No failures?"

"None."

Avalon considered that, but as he prepared for the next question, Gonzalo broke in. His head was leaning on one palm, but the fingers of that hand were carefully disposed in such a way as not to disarray his hair. He said, "Now, wait, Larri, would it be right to suggest that you tackled only easy cases? The really puzzling cases you might have made no attempts to explain?"

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"You mean," said Larri, "that I shied away from anything that might spoil my perfect record or that might upset my belief in the rational order of the universe? —If so, you're quite wrong, Dr. Gonzalo. Most reports of apparent mystical powers are dull and unimportant, crude and patently false. I ignore those. The cases I do take on are precisely the puzzling ones that have attracted attention because of their unusual nature and their apparent divorce from the rational. So, you see, the ones I take on are precisely those you suspect I avoid."

Gonzalo subsided and Avalon said, "Larri, the mere fact that you can duplicate a trick by prestidigitation doesn't mean that it couldn't also have been performed by a mystic through supernatural means. The fact that human beings can build machines that fly doesn't mean that birds are man-made machines."

"Quite right," said Larri, "but mystics lay their claims to supernatural powers on the notion, either expressed or implicit, that there is no other way of producing the effect. If I show that the same effect *can* by produced by natural means, the burden of proof then shifts to them to show that the effect can be produced after the natural means are made impossible. I don't know of any mystic who has accepted the conditions set by professional magicians to guard against trickery and who then succeeded."

"And nothing has ever baffled you? Not even the tricks other magicians have developed?"

"Oh, yes, there are effects produced by some magicians that baffle me in the sense that I don't know quite how they do it. I might duplicate the effect by perhaps using a different method. In any case, that's not the point. As long as an effect is produced by natural means, it doesn't matter whether I can reproduce it or not. I am not the best magician in the world. I am just a better magician than any mystic is."

Halsted, his high forehead flushed, and stuttering slightly in his eagerness to speak, said, "But then nothing would startle you? No disappearance like the one involving the salt shaker?"

"You mean that one?" asked Larri, pointing. There was a salt shaker in the middle of the table, but no one had seen it placed there.

Halsted, thrown off a moment, recovered and said, "Have you ever been *startled* by any disappearance? I heard once that magicians have made elephants disappear."

"Actually, making an elephant disappear is childishly simple. I

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assure you there's nothing puzzling about disappearances performed in a magic act." And then a peculiar look crossed Larri's face, a flash of sadness and frustration. "Not in a magic act. Just—"

"Yes?" said Halsted. "Just what?"

"Just in real life," said Larri, smiling and attempting to toss off the remark lightheartedly.

"Just a minute," said Trumbull, "we can't let that pass. If there has been a disappearance in real life you can't explain, we want to hear about it."

Larri shook his head, "No, no, Dr. Trumbull. It is not a mysterious disappearance or an inexplicable one. Nothing like that at all. I just—well, I lost something and can't find it and it—saddens me."

"The details," said Trumbull.

"It wouldn't be worth your attention," said Larri, embarrassed. "It's a—silly story and somewhat—" He fell into silence.

"Damn it," thundered Trumbull, "we all sit here and voluntarily refrain from asking anything that might result in your being tempted to violate your ethics. Would it violate the ethics of the magician's art for you to tell this story?"

"It's not that at all—"

"Well, then, sir, I repeat what Jeff has told you. Everything said here is in absolute confidence, and the agreement surrounding these monthly dinners is that all questions must be answered. —Manny?"

Rubin shrugged. "That's the way it is, Larri. If you don't want to answer the question we'll have to declare the meeting at an end."

Larri sat back in his chair and looked depressed. "I can't very well allow that to happen, considering the fine hospitality I've been shown. I will tell you the story, but you'll find there's not much to it. I met a woman quite accidentally; I lost touch with her; I can't locate her. That's all there is."

"No," said Trumbull, "that's not all there is. Where and how did you meet her? Where and how did you lose touch with her? Why can't you find her again? We want to know the details."

Gonzalo said, "In fact, if you tell us the details, we may be able to help you."

Larri laughed sardonically. "I think not."

"You'd be surprised," said Gonzalo. "In the past—"

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Avalon said, "Quiet, Mario. Don't make promises we might not be able to keep. —Would you give us the details, sir? I assure you we'll do our best to help."

Larri smiled wearily. "I appreciate your offer, but you will see that there is nothing you can do merely by sitting here."

He adjusted himself in his seat and said, "I was done with my performance in an upstate town—I'll give you the details when and if you insist, but for the moment they don't matter, except that this happened about a month ago. I had to get to another small town some hundred and fifty miles away for a morning show and that presented a little transportation problem.

"My magic, unfortunately, is not the kind that can transport me a hundred and fifty miles in a twinkling, or even conjure up a pair of seven-league boots. I did not have my car with me—just as well, for I don't like to travel strange roads at night when I am sleepy—and the net result was that I would have to take a bus that would take nearly four hours. I planned to catch some sleep while on wheels and thus make the trip serve a double purpose.

"But when things go wrong, they go wrong in battalions, so you can guess that I missed my bus and that the next one would not come along for two more hours. There was an enclosed station in which I could wait, one that was as dreary as you could imagine—with no reading matter except some fly-blown posters on the wall—no place to buy a paper or a cup of coffee. I thought grimly that it was fortunate it wasn't raining, and settled down to drowse, when my luck changed.

"A woman walked in. I've never been married, gentlemen, and I've never even had what young people today call a 'meaningful relationship.' Some casual attachments, perhaps, but on the whole, though it seems trite to say so, I am married to my art and find it much more satisfying than women, generally.

"I had no reason to think that this woman was an improvement on the generality, but she had a pleasant appearance. She was something over thirty, and was just plump enough to have a warm, comfortable look about her, and she wasn't too tall.

"She looked about and said, smiling, 'Well, I've missed my bus, I see.'

"I smiled with her. I liked the way she said it. She didn't fret or whine or act annoyed at the universe. It was a good-humored statement of fact, and just hearing it cheered me up tremendously because actually I myself was in the mood to fret and whine and

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act annoyed. Now I could be as good-natured as she and say, 'Two of us, madam, so you don't even have the satisfaction of being unique.'

" 'So much the better,' she said. 'We can talk and pass the time that much faster.'

"I was astonished. She did not treat me as a potential attacker or as a possible thief. God knows I am not handsome or even particularly respectable in appearance, but it was as though she had casually penetrated to my inmost character and found it satisfactory. You have no idea how flattered I was. If I were ten times as sleepy, I would have stayed up to talk to her.

"And we did talk. Inside of fifteen minutes I knew I was having the pleasantest conversation in my life—in a crummy bus station at midnight. I can't tell you all we talked about, but I can tell you what we *didn't* talk about. We didn't talk about magic.

"I can interest anyone by doing tricks, but then it isn't me they're interested in; it's the flying fingers and the patter they like. And while I'm willing to buy attention that way, you don't know how pleasant it is to get the attention without purchasing it. She apparently just liked to listen to me, and I know I liked to listen to her."

"Fortunately, my trip was not an all-out effort, so I didn't have my large trunk with the show-business advertising all over it, just two rather large valises. I told her nothing personal about myself, and asked nothing about her. I gathered briefly that she was heading for her brother's place, that it was right on the road, that she would have to wake him up because she had carelessly let herself be late—but she only told me that in order to say that she was glad it had happened. She would buy my company at the price of inconveniencing her brother. I liked that.

"We didn't talk politics or world affairs or religion or the theater. We talked people—all the funny and odd and peculiar things we had observed about people. We laughed for two hours, during which not one other person came to join us. I had never had anything like that happen to me, had never felt so alive and happy, and when the bus finally came at 1:50 A.M., it was amazing how sorry I was. I didn't want the night to end.

"When we got onto the bus, of course, it was no longer quite the same thing, even though we found a double seat we could share. After all, we had been alone in the station and there we could talk loudly and laugh. On the bus people were sleeping.

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"Of course it wasn't all bad. It was a nice feeling to have her so close to me. Despite the fact that I'm rather an old horse, I felt like a teenager—enough like a teenager, in fact, to be embarrassed at being watched.

"Immediately across the way was a woman and her young son. He was about eight years old, I should judge, and *he* was awake. He kept watching me with his sharp little eyes. I could see those eyes fixed on us every time a street light shone into the bus and it was very inhibiting. I wished he were asleep but, of course, the excitement of being on a bus, perhaps, was keeping him awake.

"The motion of the bus, the occasional whisper, the feeling of being quite out of reality, the pressure of her body against mine—it was like confusing dream and fact, and the boundary between sleep and wakefulness just vanished. I didn't intend to sleep, and I started awake once or twice, but then finally, when I started awake one more time, it was clear there had been a considerable period of sleep, and the seat next to me was empty."

Halsted said, "I take it she had gotten off."

"I didn't think she had disappeared into thin air," said Larri. "Naturally, I looked about. I couldn't call her name, because I didn't know her name. She wasn't in the rest room, because its door was swinging open.

"The little boy across the aisle spoke in a rapid high treble—in French. I can understand French reasonably well, but I didn't have to make any effort, because his mother was now awakened and she translated. She spoke English quite well.

"She said, 'Pardon me, sir, but is it that you are looking for the woman that was with you?'

" 'Yes,' I said. 'Did you see where she got off?'

" 'Not I, sir. I was sleeping. But my son says that she descended at the place of the Cross of Lorraine.'

" 'At the what?'

"She repeated it, and so did the child, in French.

"She said, 'You must excuse my son, sir. He is a great hero worshipper of President Charles de Gaulle and though he is young he knows the tale of the Free French forces in the war very well. He would not miss a sight like a Cross of Lorraine. If he said he saw it, he did.'

"I thanked them and then went forward to the bus driver and asked him, but at that time of night the bus stops wherever a passenger would like to get off, or get on. He had made numerous

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stops and let numerous people on and off, and he didn't know for sure where he had stopped and whom he had left off. He was rather churlish, in fact."

Avalon cleared his throat. "He may have thought you were up to no good and was deliberately withholding information to protect the passenger."

"Maybe," said Larri despondently, "but what it amounted to was that I had lost her. When I came back to my seat, I found a little note tucked into the pocket of the jacket I had placed in the rack above. I managed to read it by a streetlight at the next stop, where the French mother and son got off. It said, 'Thank you so much for a delightful time. Gwendolyn.' "

Gonzalo said, "You have her first name anyway."

Larri said, "I would appreciate having had her last name, her address, her telephone number. A first name is useless."

"You know," said Rubin, "she may deliberately have withheld information because she wasn't interested in continuing the acquaintanceship. A romantic little interlude is one thing; a continuing danger is another. She may be a married woman."

"Have you done anything about trying to find her?" asked Gonzalo.

"Certainly," said Larri sardonically. "If a magician is faced with a disappearing woman he must understand what has happened. I have gone over the bus route twice by car, looking for a Cross of Lorraine. If I had found it, I would have gone in and asked if anyone there knew a woman by the name of Gwendolyn. I'd have described her. I'd have gone to the local post office or the local police station."

"But you have not found a Cross of Lorraine, I take it," said Trumbull.

"I have not."

Halsted said, "Mathematically speaking, it's a finite problem. You could try every post office along the whole route."

Larri sighed. "If I get desperate enough, I'll try. But, mathematically speaking, that would be so inelegant. Why can't I find the Cross of Lorraine?"

"The youngster might have made a mistake," said Trumbull.

"Not a chance," said Larri. "An adult, yes, but a child, never. Adults have accumulated enough irrationality to be very unreliable eyewitnesses. A bright eight-year-old is different. Don't try to pull any trick on a bright kid; he'll see through it.

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"Just the same," he went on, "nowhere on the route is there a restaurant, a department store, or anything else with the name Cross of Lorraine. I've checked every set of yellow pages along the entire route."

"Now wait a while," said Avalon, "that's wrong. The child wouldn't have seen the words because they would have meant nothing to him. If he spoke and read only French, as I suppose he did, he would know the phrase as 'Crois de Lorraine.' The English would have never caught his eyes. He must have seen the symbol, the cross with the two horizontal bars, like this." He reached out and Henry obligingly handed him a menu.

Avalon turned it over and on the blank back drew the following:

"Actually," he said, "it is more properly called the Patriarchal Cross or the Archiepiscopal Cross since it symbolized the high office of patriarchs and archbishops by doubling the bars. You will not be surprised to hear that the Papal Cross has three bars. The Patriarchal Cross was used as a symbol by Godfrey of Bouillon, who was one of the leaders of the First Crusade, and since he was Duke of Lorraine, it came to be called the Cross of Lorraine. As we all know, it was adopted as the emblem of the Free French during the Hitlerian War." He coughed slightly and tried to look modest.

Larri said, a little impatiently, "I understand about the symbol, Dr. Avalon, and I didn't expect the youngster to note words. I think you'll agree, though, that any establishment calling itself the Cross of Lorraine would surely display the symbol along with the name. I looked for the name in the yellow pages and for the symbol on the road."

"And you didn't find it?" said Gonzalo.

"As I've already said, I didn't. I was desperate enough to consider things I didn't think the kid could possibly have seen at night. I thought, who knows how sharp young eyes are and how readily they may see something that represents an overriding

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interest? So I looked at signs in windows, at street signs—even at graffiti."

"If it were a graffito," said Trumbull, "which happens to be the singular form of graffiti, by the way, then, of course, it could have been erased between the time the child saw it and the time you came to look for it."

"I'm not sure of that," said Rubin. "It's my experience that graffiti are never erased. We've got some on the outside of our apartment house—"

"That's New York," said Trumbull. "In smaller towns there's less tolerance for these evidences of anarchy."

"Hold on," said Gonzalo, "what make you think graffiti are necessarily signs of anarchy? As a matter of fact—"

"Gentlemen! Gentlemen!" And as always, when Avalon's voice was raised to its full baritone, a silence fell. "We are not here to argue the merits and demerits of graffiti. The question is: how can we find this woman who disappeared? Larri has found no restaurant or other establishment with the name of Cross of Lorraine; he has found no evidence of the symbol along the route taken. Can we help him?"

Drake held up his hand and squinted through the curling smoke of his cigarette. "Hold on, there's no problem. Have you ever seen a Russian Orthodox Church? Do you know what its cross is like?" He made quick marks on the back of the menu and shoved it toward the center of the table. "Here—"

He said, "The kid, being hipped on the Free French, would take a quick look at that and see it as the Cross of Lorraine. So what you have to do, Larri, is look for a Russian Orthodox Church en route. I doubt there would be more than one."

Larri thought about it, but did not seem overjoyed. "The cross with that second bar set at an angle would be on the top of the spire, wouldn't it?"

"I imagine so."

"And it wouldn't be floodlighted, would it? How would the child

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be able to see it at three or four o'clock in the morning?"

Drake stubbed out his cigarette. "Well, now, churches usually have a bulletin board near the entrance. There could have been a Russian Orthodox cross on the—"

"I would have seen it," said Larri firmly.

"Could it have been a Red Cross?" asked Gonzalo feebly. "You know, there might be a Red Cross headquarters along the route."

"The RED Cross," said Rubin, "is a Greek Cross with all four arms equal. I don't see how that could possibly be mistaken for a Cross of Lorraine by a Free French enthusiast. Look at it—"

Halsted said, "The logical thing, I suppose, is that you simply missed it, Larri. If you insist that, as a magician, you're such a trained observer that you *couldn't* have missed it, then maybe it was a symbol on something movable—on a truck in a driveway, for instance—and it moved on after sunrise."

"The boy made it quite clear that it was at the *place* of the Cross of Lorraine," said Larri. "I suppose even an eight-year-old can tell the difference between a place and a movable object."

"He spoke French. Maybe you mistranslated."

"I'm not that bad at the language," said Larri, "and besides, his mother translated and French is her native tongue."

"But English isn't. *She* might have gotten it wrong. The kid might have said something else. He might not even have said the Cross of Lorraine at all."

Avalon raised his hand for silence and said, "One moment, gentlemen, I see Henry, our esteemed waiter, smiling. What is it, Henry?"

Henry, from his place at the sideboard, said, "I'm afraid that I am amused at your doubting the child's evidence. It is quite certain, in my opinion, that he did see the Cross of Lorraine."

There was a moment's silence and Larri said, "How can you tell that, Henry?"

"By not being too subtle, sir."

Avalon's voice boomed out. "I knew it! We're being too complicated. Henry, how is it possible for us to achieve greater simplicity?"

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"Why, Mr. Avalon, the incident took place at night. Instead of looking at all signs, all places, all varieties of cross, why not begin by asking ourselves what very few things *can* be easily seen on a highway at night?"

"A Cross of Lorraine?" asked Gonzalo incredulously.

"Certainly," said Henry, "among other things. Especially, if we don't call it a Cross of Lorraine. What the youngster saw as a Cross of Lorraine, out of his special interest, we would see as something else so clearly that its relationship to the Cross of Lorraine would be invisible. What has been happening just now has been precisely what happened earlier with Mr. Larri's trick with the coin and the salt shaker. We concentrated on the coin and didn't watch the salt shaker, and now we concentrate on the Cross of Lorraine and don't look for the alternative."

Trumbull said, "Henry, if you don't stop talking in riddles, you're fired. What the hell is the Cross of Lorraine, if it isn't the Cross of Lorraine?"

Henry said gravely, "What is this?" and carefully he drew on the back of the menu—

Trumbull said, "A Cross of Lorraine—tilted."

"No, sir, you would never have thought so, if we hadn't been talking about the Cross of Lorraine. Those are English letters and a very common symbol on highways if you add something to it—" He wrote quickly and the tilted Cross became:

"The one thing," said Henry, "that is designed to be seen without trouble, day or night, on any highway, is a gas-station sign. The child saw the Cross of Lorraine in this one, but Mr. Larri, retracing the route, sees only a double X, since he reads the en-

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tire sign as Exxon. All signs showing this name, whether on the highway, in advertisements, or on credit cards, show the name in this fashion.

Now Larri caught fire. "You mean, Henry, that if I go into the Exxon stations en route and ask for Gwendolyn—"

"The proprietor of one of them is likely to be her brother, and there would not be more than a half dozen or so at most to inquire at."

"Good God, Henry," said Larri, "you're a magician."

"Merely simple-minded," said Henry, "though not, I hope, in the pejorative sense."

"Q"

CRIMINALIMERICK

BLACK WIDOWERS: RUBIN

by D. R. BENSEN

Writer Rubin is not unassuming;
He's the Widowers' ace at presuming.
He's had many careers
But, clearly, one fears,
None of them dealing with grooming.

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a NEW story by

JON L. BREEN

Each new 'tec take-off by Jon L. Breen reconfirms his position as the foremost parodist and pastichist in the mystery field. This new one is not only a double burlesque—double in the sense that it spoofs both the Black Widowers and their creator—but is a satisfyingly clever story strictly on its own merits.

This companion piece to the real McAsimov is the real McBreen . . .

AN EVENING WITH THE WHITE DIVORCEES

by JON L. BREEN

"Now tell us please, Mr. Sousa," said Godfrey Catalina, the patent attorney, "how do you justify your existence?"

Calvin Sousa, guest of the White Divorcees at their regular monthly dinner meeting in a private room of the Garibaldi Restaurant on Fifth Avenue, had been in a surly and irritable mood all evening. Now he looked at his questioner rather unbelievingly and then transferred his gaze to the little group's other members one by one with an expression of withering disgust.

"How do *I* justify my existence? After sitting through two hours of your cutesy table talk, I am astonished you have the nerve to ask *me* that question. You supercilious jokers with your self-satisfied smirks seem to think you're the original Algonquin Round Table."

"I want to be Robert Benchley," writer Ezekiel Lubin put in.

"Which one's Dorothy Parker?" artist Grimaldo Moreno asked, leering at his fellow members.

Calvin Sousa groaned. "I give up. I sat through the first three books of the Old Testament tonight in clerihews—"

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Mathematics teacher Halsey Millstead interrupted defensively. "Look, after doing *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* in 185,374 haikus, I had to take on *something* challenging, didn't I?"

"Challenging, he says. I'll show you challenging. As I started to say, I sat through all that because I had been given to understand you people might be able to help me with my problem."

"Problem?" echoed Timothy Turnbull, the code-and-cipher expert. "Now we're getting down to business. The White Divorcees love a good problem. I myself have devoted my life to a solution for the common code."

Their guest got to his feet. "That's what I mean. Look, fellows, it's been a nice dinner, and I apologize for being out of sorts but I'm afraid presenting my story to you would be a waste of everyone's time, especially mine. I'm convinced you can't help me. Everybody here has said enough to persuade me that the kind of thinking I want is not to be found in this room. But no offense is intended—I'm sure that taken one by one, you're quite reasonable men. But in a group you're more than I can take."

"Did you say everybody?" Godfrey Catalina asked.

"Won't you have some brandy, sir?" asked Harry, the White Divorcees' regular waiter.

Sousa shook his head, looking right at the inconspicuous little man holding the brandy bottle, and said, "Yes, everybody. Not a first-rate mind in the bunch, if you'll forgive me."

"Of course we'll forgive you," said chemist Charles Gander. "But why not sit down and tell us the problem anyway? It's what we came to hear, and sometimes a person very close to a problem can miss the obvious, overlook something a fresh mind, first-rate or not, will spot at once. I mean, you've wasted two hours already . . ."

Sousa sat down again and accepted a second glass of brandy. Harry faded back into the shadows of the room, by the bar, while Calvin Sousa began his story.

"I am by profession a roboticist—president, in fact, of the United States Robot Development Corporation. I don't know how much you gentlemen know about the science of robotics, but tremendous strides have been made in recent years in the creation of humanoid robots with positronic brains. In fact, there are some such now employed in the work force, generally without the knowledge of those who work with them. I must add that they are quite illegal and have nothing to do with my company. For some

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reason people feel threatened by humanoid robots and it is against the law to have them operate outside certain designated, closely controlled test sites until the powers that be are convinced of their safety."

"I can see why," said Ezekiel Lubin. "The idea of machines walking around looking and acting like men scares me too."

"Why?"

"You never know what one might do."

"But we *do* know!" Calvin Sousa almost shouted. "People are detestably ignorant of the nature of positronic robots, and no amount of public education on our part seems to be able to change their minds. Has any of you gentlemen ever heard of the three laws of robotics?"

The White Divorcees all looked blank.

Harry coughed softly and said in a tentative voice, "I have, sir."

Sousa looked pleasantly surprised. "Then perhaps you can enlighten these gentlemen."

"Well, briefly, sir, the first law is that no robot can injure a human being or through inaction allow a human being to come to harm. The second law is that a robot must obey any orders given it by a human being so long as they do not conflict with the first law. And the third law states that a robot must protect its own existence as long as this does not conflict with either of the first two laws."

"Very good. That's it exactly. You can see, gentlemen, that at least some members of the public have been reached by my firm's educational and public-relations efforts. I have recently felt that the tide is turning. But now it appears that, in direct contradiction of the first law, a robot has committed murder!

"Quite impossible, but how else could it have happened? Robot training and testing at our local office is carried on in a large room something like an operating theater. Observers can watch the training take place from behind any of several one-way windows overlooking the training area. They can also hear what is being said through small speakers.

"One morning early this week I entered one of the observation boxes to watch one of my associates, Peter Griswold, working with Isaac 100, one of our newest and most complex positronic robots. For several minutes the two of them conversed quietly, neither saying anything unusual or unexpected, and then suddenly Isaac 100 raised his arms in the air and brought them down on the

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head of Peter Griswold, viciously, again and again.

"In a panel by the observer's chair there is a button—panic button, if you will—that allows the observer to immediately inactivate the brain of the robot in the training room. I pushed it, and the attack by Isaac 100 ceased and he stood motionless as Peter Griswold slumped to the floor.

"I rushed into the corridor and took the elevator down to the floor of the training theater. Moments later I was at Peter Griswold's side, but I was too late. He had a fractured, nay, a crushed skull—the superhuman strength of the robot had killed him. And to this moment I do not know why or how it happened.

"The accident was immediately reported to the police and the appropriate Federal agency. I requested permission to reactivate Isaac 100 and find out from him what had happened, but permission was denied. The Robotics Experimentation Board has ordered Isaac 100 dismantled before he can harm anyone else, and I fear the whole process of robot experimentation will be stopped unless I can find an adequate explanation for how this happened."

"Could Griswold have insulted the robot in some way?" Catalina asked.

"How do you insult a robot?" Lubin snorted.

"Oh, a robot can be insulted," Sousa assured them. "They have very, very complex brains, I assure you, and are subject to many surprisingly human reactions, I might even say frailties. But nothing Griswold could have said to the robot could have caused him to break the first law, let alone break it so suddenly and so decisively."

"Mr. Sousa, were there any persons at the training center that day who had reason to be unfriendly to the robot development project?" Harry asked quietly.

"Unfriendly? Well, as a matter of fact, I suppose there were. There was Kenneth Wooster, a brilliant robotic technician I had recently fired for drinking on the job, and there was also the union leader, Art Stryker, who was making a tour of the plant. He is very concerned about robots taking people's jobs away from them, but that has nothing to do with the problem at hand. I mean, Isaac 100 killed Griswold. I saw it with my own eyes and I want to know how it happened."

"Perhaps he was hypnotized," Halsey Millstead offered.

"The robot? I suppose you could hypnotize a robot, but how could you make it do something under hypnosis it wouldn't

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do ordinarily? You can't even make a person go against his natural inclinations under hypnosis, and the three laws built into the positronic brain of the robot are so much stronger than the most strongly entrenched human inhibitions."

"Mr. Sousa," asked Harry, "who was taking Art Stryker on the tour of the plant?'

"Why, Kenneth Wooster as a matter of fact."

"And who else was around the training area that morning?"

"No one. It was very early in the morning. There was just me and Griswold and Stryker and Wooster—no one else could have got past the security guard. Security is very tight, I assure you."

"Did Stryker bring anything with him when he arrived for his tour that morning?"

"Just a rolled-up rug about six feet long. Look, I didn't come here to discuss trivialities with a waiter."

"You came to discuss trivialities with the White Divorcees, right?" said Godfrey Catalina.

"I didn't come here to discuss trivialities with anybody. I came here to get a solution to my problem."

"Mr. Sousa," said Ezekiel Lubin, "Harry is considered a full member of the White Divorcees."

"And that gives him a license to discuss trivialities? Do you gentlemen have any suggestions or not?'

"It was all a practical joke," offered Timothy Turnbull. "Griswold just pretended to have a crushed skull."

"It wasn't really Isaac 100 who killed Griswold," Halsey Millstead speculated, "but either Wooster or Stryker disguised as Isaac 100."

"Nice try," said Sousa. "Good to know somebody's taking this seriously. But Wooster and Stryker are both a head shorter than Isaac 100. And no human being has the kind of strength it took to kill Griswold that way, just pounding him to the floor with the hands. Besides which, you think I wouldn't recognize my own robot? It was Isaac 100 all right."

"What was the rug for?" asked Harry

"The what?"

"The rolled-up rug Stryker had."

"Oh, I think he said he has a cousin in the rug business, and Wooster had ordered a rug for his office. When he found out Wooster had been fired, he just took the rug away with him again. Well, come on, come on, any more bright ideas?"

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"Mr. Sousa," said Harry, "it would be possible, would it not, to build a positronic robot to look exactly like a living person?"

"Of course it would be possible. It's not something we've done because we've been concentrating on the brain, but it could be done quite easily. Look, I like to talk about my work and answer your questions, but this isn't—"

"I have a suggestion," said Harry. "Probably quite silly, but you might consider it."

"Better listen to him, Sousa," Charles Gander advised.

"Oh, very well. Go on."

"Suppose Stryker brought rolled up in his rug a robot built secretly by Wooster away from the plant, a robot built to look exactly like Griswold. Stryker and Wooster waylay the real Griswold on his way to the training session and substitute for him the robot Griswold. Then the robot Griswold identifies himself to Isaac 100 as another robot and explains that an experiment is being carried on to test the strength and durability of the new model and demonstrate it to Mr. Sousa as a surprise.

"Thus they will enter the training theater and carry on as if the robot were Griswold, but on a predetermined signal Isaac 100 will see how much damage he can do to the robot Griswold. Isaac 100 would never attack a human being that way, but he would have no hesitation, if ordered to do so, to attack another robot."

"But you forget, I saw Griswold's crushed skull."

"Did you have the training theater in sight at all times?"

"Of course not. Not for the time it took me to leave the observation box, get to the elevator, and—"

"And in that period, sir, Wooster and Stryker had time to substitute the real Griswold, murdered by them by crushing his skull elsewhere in the plant earlier, for the robot Griswold, and roll the robot back into the rug. Stryker then left with the robot Griswold before the crime had been reported."

Sousa looked amazed. "I wouldn't have believed it! Who would have thought that a union leader and a disgruntled employee would get together on a scheme to discredit robotics? It just proves that you can always trust robots and never trust humans, which I should have known all along."

"Another triumph, Harry," Godfrey Catalina said heartily.

Ezekiel Lubin asked, "But how on earth did you know?"

Harry only smiled. The White Divorcees thought his smile looked slightly metallic.

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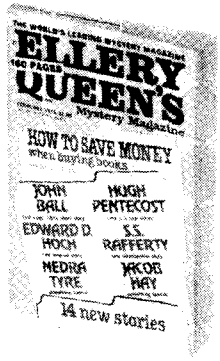

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A sparkling and amusing short-short . . .

FAN FARE

by MARJORIE RIDDELL

"I'll dictate this to you, Miss Thompson, and then I'd like you to type a rough draft. We'll get the final copy finished this afternoon. Now, let me see . . .

"Ready, Miss Thompson? Right. Here we go . . . The publishers present yet another brilliant novel from the fertile pen of Grange Ranger—type that in caps, the name, I mean. From the fertile pen of Grange Ranger. Here is a thriller with thrills to surpass even those in his previous successes.

"The publishers are proud and honored—no, cross that out, not honored. It's true, God knows, but the word's a little dated, I fear.

"Where was I? The publishers are proud to give you his latest distinguished title, which will even further enhance the reputation of this brilliant author, already widely acclaimed on both sides of the Atlantic—no, wait a minute, I've already said brilliant. What's another word for brilliant? Where's the dictionary?

"Brilliant, brilliant, brilliant, brill, I didn't know brill resembled turbot. Brilliant. Ah, illustrious. That will do. Illustrious author already widely et cetera.

"Er—we defy you to read this book after midnight, alone, in the dark, while impenetrable fog grips London in a sinister—no, that won't do. Damn these clean-air fanatics with their smokeless fuel and central heating. We haven't had a decent fog for years.

"Er—midnight, alone, in the dark, it's as much of a pest as their taking arsenic out of weed killer. Alone, in the dark, while the wind howls and the—the—why the devil aren't there any coyotes in London? While the wind howls through the gravestones of centuries.

"How's that? No, make it gravestones of time. Doesn't mean a damn thing but it sounds better.

"Grange Ranger, in caps, was born in 1930, no, in 1935, no, in 1939, no, in Manchester. For God's sake, where are my notes? Yes, in Manchester.

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"He took his degree at Liverpool University, no, he attended Manchester Grammar School, no, after leaving school he worked as a lumberjack, plumber, lawyer, bargee, horse trainer, dentist, and as a Kentish silkworm farmer before working his way round the world in a fishing smack. Wait a minute, damn, we don't have lumberjacks in England. Or do we? It sounds wrong.

"What do we have? For God's sake, somebody must chop down trees! What about all that oak? Beams and things. Forestry workers. Doesn't sound so good. Make it a dance-hall bouncer. We have those, I've seen them on TV. Or was it American TV? Or maybe they got it from British TV. Or did we get it from American TV? Cross it out.

"Fishing smack, yes. Funny about brill. Then friends who had read some of his letters persuaded him to try his hand at writing a novel, and the result we all know: brilliance, no, wait a minute, brilliant, brilliant, brilliant, brill—sparkling, that's it. Sparkling wit, striking talent, and here again is the magical mixture.

"Here again we give you the chill, the thrill, the kill! In the latest Grange Ranger, in caps! That's it, Miss Thompson. But think up some more words for brilliant, will you?"

"Very good, Mr. Ranger."

"Q"

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a NEW Dr. Sam Hawthorne story by

EDWARD D. HOCH

Once again Dr. Sam Hawthorne, retired New England country doctor, reminisces—this time about an impossible double crime that happened back in 1925 on the night train from Northmont to Boughville. One of the most baffling locked-room mysteries you've read in a year of Sundays—the "miracle problem" of murder and theft in a caboose with all its windows and doors locked and bolted on the inside—and no trace of the killer and the stolen jewelry. All this and a dying message too!

A devotee's detective delight! . . .

THE PROBLEM OF THE LOCKED CABOOSE

by EDWARD D. HOCH

"Caboose!" Dr. Sam Hawthorne exploded. "It's a wonderful word and we hardly hear it any more. It's a word that was important back when trains were important—more important than they are now, anyway. Let me fill your glass . . . another small—ah—libation . . . an' you settle back in your chair. I'll tell you about a train trip I took in the spring of 1925, and about the impossible theft—and impossible murder too!—that happened in the locked caboose . . ."

The spring floods that year had washed out most of the back roads between Northmont and the towns to the west, which is why I was forced to take the train to Boughville in the first place. I didn't much like train travel, but my Pierce-Arrow Runabout couldn't forge flood-swollen streams, so I had no choice. The doctor in Boughville, who'd done me some favors in the past, had asked me to take over his patients while he and his wife celebrated their 25th wedding anniversary with a cruise to Europe on the

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Mauretania. The previous year the ship had broken all Atlantic speed records, making the crossing from Ambrose Channel Light Vessel to Cherbourg Breakwater in five days, one hour, and 49 minutes. To sail on the *Mauretania* in 1925 was the height of luxurious travel.

For me, I'd have to be content with a train ride to Boughville.

In order to arrive in time for morning appointments, it was necessary to take the night train from Northmont. Though the trip was less than two hours by car, the circuitous route of the Boston & Western more than doubled that time as it stopped at every little hamlet with the morning's milk and newspapers. But there was a Pullman car on the train so I could catch a few hours' sleep. In those days it was not uncommon for doctors to flag down trains with a lantern to board them at a nonscheduled station—and to depart at their destination by jumping off as the train slowed to five miles an hour. I'd done it just once, landing on gravel and scraping my hand so badly it pained me for weeks.

On the evening of my departure April packed an overnight bag for me an' was waitin' at the office door with all the solicitude of a mother hen. "Be careful now, Dr. Sam. Remember last time—no jumpin' off movin' trains!"

"Don't worry, I'll take care," I assured her.

"Mebbe if you have time you could bring me some o' that good maple syrup they make there."

"This is the time o' year for it. I'll see what I can do." I hefted my overnight bag and decided she'd packed enough for a week's stay. "I don't really need all this stuff, April. I'll just slip a few things into a physician's satchel and travel light."

It was an hour till train time at midnight, and I stopped at the town's lunch counter for a sandwich and a little cup of bootleg Scotch before they closed. Then I went on to the depot.

"You travelin' tonight, Dr. Sam?" the stationmaster asked.

"Just as far as Boughville. Fillin' in for the doc while he takes a cruise to Europe."

"That's where we all should be." He glanced nervously at his big pocket watch. "Wish that ol' train would be early for once!"

"What's the trouble?"

"Got a special shipment of valuables to put aboard."

"Valuables—on that old clunker? How come?"

"Most of our passenger trains don't have cabooses. This one does 'cause it hauls some freight cars too. The caboose is a paymaster's

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car with barred windows and a good strong safe." He glanced around and lowered his voice. "They're shippin' the Glenworth jewelry collection to Boston for appraisal and auction."

"That should bring a fancy price!" Old Mrs. Glenworth had died of pneumonia during the hard winter, leaving a small fortune in jewelry acquired during four decades of marriage to one of the state's leading industrialists. "You mean they're shipping it to Boston without a guard?"

"The family lawyer is travelin' with it. He should be here any minute now."

"Still, it's a long way around. That train won't reach Boston till mid-morning, after having stopped in every village in the state. My God, the train's goin' west, and you want to ship it east!"

The stationmaster nodded. "I know, but it's the only train that's got a safe, you see. Parsons—that's the lawyer—don't trust himself to just carry the jewelry. He wants it locked up, protected from train robbers."

I had to chuckle at the thought of it. "You think they'll block the track and ride up on horses?"

"Men have done stranger things for a quarter of a million dollars."

I whistled softly. "That much?"

"So Parsons tells me." He glanced over at the door as it opened, and his nervousness transmitted itself to me. I almost expected to see a masked man waving a gun, but it was only the little lawyer, Jasper Parsons, whom I'd seen around town on occasion.

"Who's this?" Parsons asked, as jumpy as we had been. Then, his eyes growing accustomed to the light, he said, "Oh, it's Dr. Hawthorne, isn't it? Are you travelin' tonight, Doctor?"

"Just as far as Boughville, to see some patients. I hope to get a berth and catch a few hours' sleep."

"I'm on my way to Boston," Parsons said. "The long way around." Then, to the stationmaster, "Do you have the strongbox?"

"Right here—and glad to be rid of it!"

From somewhere far down the tracks came the mournful wail of a train whistle. "It's coming," I said.

The little lawyer slipped a small revolver from his jacket pocket. "I'm takin' no chances. I won't rest safely till this shipment is in Boston an' out of my care." He glanced at me and his face lit up with a sudden thought. "Dr. Hawthorne, you can be of assis-

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tance if you will. This strongbox won't fit in the train's safe, so I have to transfer the contents. I'd like you to witness the transfer."

"Glad to."

Presently a single glowing headlight appeared down the track, and the night train rolled into the Northmont station with a roar and a hiss of escaping steam. I felt the old thrill that everyone of that era experienced at the arrival of a train—the thrill of being suddenly dwarfed by this massive iron monster that towered above you all smokin' and alive.

We walked quickly to the rear of the train, with Parsons and the stationmaster carrying the strongbox between them. The lawyer's free hand still gripped the revolver, like some modern-day Wells Fargo driver, and I couldn't help chuckling at the melodrama of it.

At the red-painted caboose we were met by a conductor swinging a lantern. He was a German named Fritz Schmidt, and he spoke English with a decided accent. "*Ja*, I am expecting you. Unload your strongbox while I open the safe." His youthful blond features rather surprised me.

I followed them up the steps to the caboose door, standin' on the platform of the adjoining Pullman car. The conductor unlocked the door with a great deal of fanfare, and I had time to study the door itself. It was thick and firmly anchored in its casing, with a small square opening about at chest level. The opening was barred like a teller's window in a bank, and covered with glass.

"They use this car for payrolls," Schmidt explained in his thick accent. "Take it out where the workers are repairing track an' pay them right from here. *Ja*, it is safe."

To my eyes the safe did indeed seem impregnable. It was made of thick steel and bolted to the floor of the caboose. In those dingy surroundings it seemed the sturdiest thing in sight. The conductor swung the safe door wide for our inspection, then motioned for Parsons to produce the jewelry.

At that moment the train gave a sudden lurch forward, throwing us off balance, and began to creep ahead. Out the dirty window of the caboose I saw the stationmaster waving his lantern. We were under way.

"Take this list," Parsons said, thrusting a document upon me, "and check off the pieces as I hand them to the conductor." He opened the strongbox and removed a flat velvet-covered jewel case

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whose lid he raised for my inspection. "One emerald necklace."

I gaped at the beautiful green and gold ornament and almost forgot to check it off. A country doctor doesn't get to see many treasures like that! And what followed was even more amazing—diamonds an' rubies, all in exquisite settings worthy of a queen. There were nine pieces in all, each more lovely than the others. I wondered if his estimate of $250,000 hadn't been on the low side.

"All there," I confirmed as the final piece was placed in the safe and the steel door slammed shut. The conductor twirled the dial and tried the handle, making certain it was locked.

"Will there be someone in here all night?" Jasper Parsons wanted to know.

Schmidt motioned toward a bunk bed. "I will be sleeping here. It will be safe. Not to worry."

Parsons left the empty strongbox on the floor and we went out, crossing the swaying platform to the Pullman car. Behind us we heard the conductor bolt and lock the inside of the caboose door. I could see his face in the little barred window, looking just the least bit sinister.

In the Pullman car we were greeted by a conductor smoking a long curved-stem pipe while he collected fares. Unlike Schmidt this conductor was obviously American, though with a trace of Irish heritage. "Find your berths, fellas. An' gimme your ticket to punch. Me name's O'Brian, an' I take no sass from drunks or troublemakers. We're here to sleep an' anyone makin' a racket will find themselves off the train at trackside!"

"I'm Dr. Sam Hawthorne. Could you wake me ten minutes before we reach Boughville?"

"Sure will, Doc. You're in Berth Number Nine."

Jasper Parsons was assigned to berth Number Seven, but when the little lawyer attempted to pull back the curtains and climb in, he discovered to his horror that it was already occupied. A burly bald man in paisley pajamas growled out, "What do you want?"

The Irish conductor almost dropped his pipe. "Mr. Apple! I clean forgot you was in there! Sorry to disturb yeh. Here, Mr. Parsons, you take the upper."

"I don't sleep in an upper berth," the lawyer replied with feeling.

O'Brian scratched his head. "Well," he said finally, "I guess that end berth is empty. Take that one."

The commotion brought a response from across the aisle. The

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curtain of Number Eleven was pushed aside and a young woman's blonde head appeared. "Is this going to go on all night, for heaven's sake? I'm trying to sleep!"

"My apologies," I offered, never one to ignore a pretty face. "I'm Sam Hawthorne, travelin' as far as Boughville."

"That's a coincidence. I'm bound for there myself."

"I thought only doctors arrived in Boughville at four A.M."

She propped herself up on one elbow, careful to remain decently covered. "Doctors and artists. They say the spring sunrise over Boughville Pond is one of the loveliest sights in all New England."

"I hope you enjoy it," I said. "Now I'll let you get back to sleep."

I climbed into my berth and started to undress. It was always a trick in the cramped quarters of a Pullman and I managed to bump my head twice before settling down. A glance at my watch showed it was now almost midnight.

"You all settled in, Doc?" O'Brian asked.

"Sure am." I poked my head out. Down the aisle the little lawyer was filling a paper cup with water before returning to his berth. "Do you and Schmidt change off here?"

"Not tonight. He's worked his shift an' he's sleepin' in the caboose till we hit Boston on the return trip. Havin' a swig o' bootleg Scotch too, if I know him. Want some?"

"No, thanks."

"Have a good rest. I'll wake ye in plenty of time for Boughville."

I rolled over beneath the covers, trying to get comfortable, and listened to the clicking of the wheels on the tracks.

I must have been dozing, but not really asleep, when I felt a hand shaking me awake. "What is it?" I mumbled. "Boughville already?"

O'Brian the conductor was leaning close to my head, whispering. "No, it's only two o'clock. But I think Schmidt is hurt. He needs a doctor."

I mumbled something and groped for my bag. There was no way I could walk through the car in my pajamas, so I quickly pulled on my pants over them. Still feeling a bit naked in my bare feet, I swung out of the berth and followed the conductor toward the rear of the train.

I'd have guessed the train was travelin' at about 20 miles an

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hour, swayin' just enough so it was necessary to brace myself now and again to keep my balance. With the heavy medical bag in one hand it was no easy chore. And crossing the platform between cars made me jump when my bare feet touched the cold metal.

If I'd expected to find the caboose door standing open, I was in for a surprise. It was still closed just as we'd left it, but the Irish conductor motioned me to peer in the little barred window. "See him in there?"

Fritz Schmidt was sprawled on the floor of the caboose, face down in front of the safe. Little rivulets of blood ran off in all directions from under his body, impelled by the constant swaying of the train. From him my eyes went immediately to the safe. The door of the safe was standing ajar, and I knew we'd find it empty.

"How do we get in here?" I asked, trying the door without success.

"We don't, without breaking in. My keys don't work. He's got it bolted from the inside."

I tapped the glass of the little barred window. "Doesn't this thing open? You must open it for payrolls."

"It can only be opened from the inside. It's got a little spring bolt that snaps shut when it's closed."

I ran my fingers along the edges of the door frame, but there was not even the crack of an opening. I got down on my knees on the cold metal platform and felt beneath the door, but there was no space there either. I realized suddenly that a thin metal edge ran around the door on all four sides, like a modified ship's bulkhead, and I remembered stepping over it when I'd entered the caboose with Parsons earlier.

"We have to reach him," I insisted. "He may be still alive. Isn't there a trap door in the roof?"

"Sure, but ye can see from here it's bolted shut on the inside."

"Then how about the back door, to the rear platform? Can you go over the top of the car and try it? We'll never get in this way."

"All right," he agreed. "I'll try it."

He climbed up the metal ladder on our platform and I could hear him going across the roof of the caboose to the far end. I was acutely aware of the cool night air as I stood shivering in my bare feet waiting for him to appear at the opposite end of the car. Finally I could see him through the barred window. And I could see now that the door on the far end was bolted too. But the window in it was bigger, and the bars set farther apart.

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O'Brian smashed the glass and reached between the bars for the bolt. He couldn't see it, but after a few moments of feeling for it he was successful. He unbolted the back door and used his key in the lock. It swung open and he hurried over to Schmidt.

I tapped on the glass at my end, urging him to open up, and he did so. "I think it's too late," he said glumly.

I grunted and went to see for myself. One hand—the right one—was outstretched, and I could see now that Schmidt had written something on the metal floor with his own blood. A single word: *elf.*

"He's dead," I confirmed, lifting the body slightly. "There's a wound in his chest. Looks like a stab wound."

"But there's no knife! What happened to the knife?"

"The killer took it with him, obviously. Along with the Glenworth jewelry."

"But—but ye saw how the caboose was locked up! How could anyone get in?"

"Schmidt could have let them in. I'm more interested in how they got out leaving all windows and doors locked and bolted on the inside."

I walked over to the heavy door by which I'd entered and unlatched the little barred window. It opened easily and when I pushed it shut the lock snapped. I estimated the window was about eight inches high by six inches wide.

"Not even a child could fit through there," the conductor said, "if that's what you're thinkin'."

"No," I agreed. "Buy maybe an elf could."

"What?"

"You'd better wake up Jasper Parsons, and tell him the jewelry is gone."

The little lawyer did not come alone. When he arrived at the caboose, fully clothed, I saw that the girl in the opposite berth had tagged along.

"You'd better stand back," I warned her. "It's not a pleasant sight."

"Is he dead? Was he murdered?" Her eyes were wide with horror.

"Yes, he's dead, and yes, we think he was murdered. Now please go back to your berth."

"I'm staying," she said firmly.

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I shrugged and turned toward Parsons. He was kneeling before the empty safe and looked as if he'd just lost his closest friend. "That jewelry was in my care," he muttered, close to tears. "This will ruin me!"

"Let's see what we can do about getting it back," I said.

"Back?"

I turned to the conductor. "Am I correct that the train has made no stops since we boarded it at Northmont?"

"That's right." He consulted his watch. "First stop is Greenhaven, in fifteen minutes."

"And the train was traveling at twenty miles an hour all that time?"

"Mostly faster. We have to slow down over this stretch at night."

"Would you say anyone could jump from a train going this fast?"

"Not a chance! Especially along here—there's all rocks an' stuff. They'd batter themselves somethin' awful."

"So I think we can assume the killer-thief is still on the train. You'd better tell the engineer we'll be stopping at Greenhaven to notify the police. It might cause a delay in the trip."

The blonde girl sighed and sat down. "I just knew I wasn't going to get to Boughville in time to paint the sunrise."

"There'll be others," I assured her. "I guess I don't even know your name. Mine's Sam Hawthorne. Folks call me Dr. Sam."

She smiled and held out her hand. "I'm Dora Winter, from Boston. Please excuse the informal attire. I learned to dress properly at finishing school, but they didn't prepare me for murder."

I gave her lace-trimmed peignoir a passing glance. "Very pretty. Tell me, did you hear anything during the past hour or so?"

She shook her head. "First you awakened me when you boarded the train, and then this man was causing a fuss." She indicated Parsons.

"But you heard nothing in between?"

"No."

The lawyer had given up on the safe and was starin' down at Schmidt's body. "How'd the killer get in here an' out again if the caboose was locked?"

"That's one of the problems," I admitted. "It seems impossible."

"But it happened," O'Brian said.

"Yes. Tell me something—how many people knew the combination of that safe?"

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"You mean, on this train? Only two of us—Schmidt an' me. But other conductors who make the run would know it."

"So unless a passenger learned the combination from someone else, the safe must have been opened by you or the dead man. Correct?"

"It sure wasn't me!" he insisted. "How could I have gotten in an' out?"

"Schmidt would have opened the door for you."

The big Irishman looked around, searching for a companion in his misery. "Sure an' he'd've opened it for Parsons here too! They were his jewels. He'd even have opened the safe for him!"

Jasper Parsons growled and threw himself at the conductor. "You're not blamin' me, you murderin' crook!"

"Stop that!" I pulled them apart and used my best voice of authority. "Now look, we won't get anywhere fightin' among ourselves. Schmidt is dead and his killer is still on this train. In a very few minutes we're going to be in Greenhaven, and then we'll have the sheriff an' the state police to answer to. Let's try to straighten this out ourselves."

"Suits me," Parsons agreed. "So long as I get that jewelry back!"

"I would think you'd be more concerned with the dead man," Dora Winter said. "My God, can't you at least cover him up?"

I took a blanket from the bunk bed and spread it over Schmidt's lifeless form. As I did so something stirred in the back of my mind. "This conductor's uniform he's wearing—is it the same one he had on earlier?"

"Sure is," O'Brian confirmed. "We don't bring no change o' uniform on these overnight runs. Hell, we're back home in the mornin'."

"And how many other passengers are on the train?"

"Not many tonight. One other, Mr. Apple, in the Pullman."

I'd forgotten about Apple. "How about the car ahead?"

"Empty."

"Crew?"

"The engineer an' fireman. That's all. A freight handler gets on at Greenhaven an' rides the rest o' the way."

I nodded. "Let's go see Mr. Apple."

We trooped back to the Pullman and woke him from a sound sleep. "What is it?" he asked.

"Could you get out o' the bunk, sir?" I'd only seen his head, an'

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I was anxious to know how tall he was. When he climbed out I could see I needn't have bothered. He was well over six feet—the tallest person on the train.

"Now what's the meaning of this? It's the middle of the night!"

"There's been a murder, Mr. Apple. We need everyone's cooperation."

"A murder? You mean here—on the train?"

"That's right," I confirmed. "In the caboose. Murder and robbery."

"My God, you're not safe anywhere these days! I suppose it was some of those Chicago bootleggers!"

The train began to slow down, coasting to a stop. It was 2:25 A.M. and we were coming into the Greenhaven station.

The sheriff of Greenhaven was a rotund individual named Putnam who was obviously annoyed at having had his sleep disturbed. He glanced at the body, grunted, and ordered his deputies to search the train for the stolen jewelry.

"They're in nine flat jewel cases," Parsons told him. "The largest is about ten inches by eight inches."

"If they're still in the cases," I said.

"What?"

"The thief could have tossed the cases off the train at any point and hidden the jewelry in a much smaller container."

"If they're on this train we'll find 'em," the sheriff assured us. "We'll search everything, including the passengers' luggage."

I didn't expect them to find anything and they didn't. A killer clever enough to escape from a locked caboose would be clever enough to hide the jewelry where it wouldn't be found.

"There's a great deal of money involved here," Jasper Parsons told the sheriff when the hour-long search turned up nothing. "You've got to recover that jewelry!"

"There's money involved in runnin' a railroad too," O'Brian snorted. "We gotta git rollin'."

I could see another battle brewing, so I stepped between them. "Maybe I can be of help. We all seem to be forgettin' that the murdered man left us a dyin' message—a message obviously pointin' to his killer. An elf is a dwarfish being of Teutonic mythology—the sort of myth the Germanic Schmidt would be familiar with. In fact, Schmidt would probably have used the word *elf* if he meant to say *dwarf*."

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"Dwarf?"

"Is there—or has there ever been—a dwarf connected with this train? Either as a crew member or recent passenger?"

O'Brian shook his head.

The sheriff was growing impatient. "What's all this business about a dwarf?"

"The conductor," I explained, "was found murdered in a locked room, but I can show you a way in which a dwarf could have killed him."

"Go ahead."

I led them back into the caboose, where the tall Mr. Apple was studying the bloodstained floor. He looked surprised when he saw us, and I was surprised to see him. The sheriff had questioned him earlier, establishing the fact that he was a traveling salesman in plumbing supplies who often rode the night train. He'd indicated then that he had no interest in the murdered conductor or the stolen jewelry. Now he looked up at me and said, "Terrible thing—terrible way to die!"

"That it is," I agreed.

Sheriff Putnam was at my shoulder. "Let's git on with this. Show us how a midget could've killed him an' escaped from this here locked caboose."

"Well, there are a number of hiding places in here for a tiny person. Under the bed covers, behind the safe, down the other end of the car behind those boxes. None of these places would hide a normal-sized man or woman, but a midget or a very small child could go undetected there."

"An' you're sayin' this midget was already hidin' there when the caboose was locked by Schmidt?"

"That's right."

"An' was still hidin' there when you broke in?"

"No, he couldn't have still been in here because O'Brian entered through the back door. He'd have seen anyone hiding behind the safe or those boxes. Besides, we stayed in here till the train reached Greenhaven. I did, at least. At one point I sent O'Brian out to wake Parsons."

"Then how'd the dwarf git out?" the sheriff demanded. I could see he wasn't buying a word of it.

I walked over to the solid door with its tiny barred window. "This window, unlike the others, can be opened from the inside. It's a paymaster's window. No one could fit through it except a

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midget or dwarf—but once through they could swing the window closed and the lock would snap shut. It's the only possible way the killer could have left the caboose locked after his departure."

Sheriff Putnam unwrapped a chew of tobacco. "How'd the midget git Schmidt to open the safe?"

"I don't know."

"By threatenin' him with the knife?"

"Maybe."

"You don't seem too sure o' things."

"I'm not. No dwarf has turned up in the case. We only have the dead man's message to hint that one even existed."

While the sheriff puzzled over this, Jasper Parsons motioned me aside. "You believe that crazy notion, Hawthorne?"

"No," I admitted. "As a matter of fact, it couldn't have happened the way I described it. If a midget went out that tiny opening, how'd he reach it? The window is chest high for a normal person. And we found no box or chair near enough for him to stand on."

"But—but if you knew it wasn't true why'd you tell the sheriff that?"

"Just to play for time. Relax—I'm tryin' my damnedest to get your jewelry back."

"I think it was that other conductor—O'Brian. He knew the combination o' that safe, an' Schmidt would've opened the door for him. He left through that door at the far end o' the caboose, which he only pretended to unlock later."

I shook my head. "I watched him pull the bolt after he broke the glass. There was no way he could have tricked it up."

The little lawyer was exasperated. "Then the crime is impossible!"

"Maybe. Maybe not."

O'Brian and the engineer were arguing with the sheriff, trying to get permission to continue the interrupted journey. "We've lost an hour already!" the conductor bellowed.

"All right, all right!" Putnam agreed at last, "but I'll ride along with you as far as Boughville. That's still in my county."

Dora Winter came up to me. "Looks like I'm going to miss my sunrise," she said quietly. "But maybe I can paint a portrait of Sheriff Putnam instead."

There was no sleep to be had during the rest of the journey. We

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sat up in the caboose, drinking bitter coffee from a blue metal pot and speculating about the killing.

"I say it was a common ordinary train robber," the salesman named Apple insisted. "He dropped onto the roof from an overhanging tree and came in through that trap door."

"What was Schmidt doin' all this time?" the sheriff asked, chewing on his tobacco.

"He was taken by surprise. The killer forced him to open the safe, then knifed him an' bolted the trap door so it would look like the murderer was one of us passengers."

"And how'd he leave the caboose?"

"There are tricks you can work with doo bolts," Apple answered vaguely.

"But not with these doors," I pointed out. "See the metal rim around them? There's no space where a string or thin wire could be pulled through. True, a string or wire could have been pulled through this little window, but the bolt goes the other way."

"Couldn't the bolt have been pushed shut with a cane or something, through the paymaster's window?"

I shook my head again. "This bolt's hard to work. Try it for yourself. A man's hand couldn't reach it through this window, and anything like a cane or a piece of pipe would probably have left scratches on the bolt—if it could move it at all from that angle. Besides, it would be a chancy, time-consumin' operation. Why would the murderer risk bothering about it? Even if the door was standin' open it wouldn't implicate anybody."

"I think I've got it!" Jasper Parsons cried. "The knife wound didn't kill Schmidt instantly. We know that because he lived long 'nough to write his dying word. Suppose the killer stabbed him an' fled. Schmidt staggered to the door, closed and bolted it, and then fell back to the floor."

"Same objection, in a way," I said. "The bolt works hard, and why would he do it if he'd already been stabbed? Why not call out for help instead? After all, we were right in the next car. Besides, it was also locked by key from the inside. He'd have had to bolt the door, take out his key and lock it, then return the key to his pocket. If he lived to do all that he was quite a man—especially since there's only a drop or two of blood near the door."

"Then it's plain impossible," the lawyer said, repeating his earlier judgment.

Sheriff Putnam spit out a glob of tobacco juice. "Elves an'

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fairies! He was killed by elves an' fairies."

As the train rumbled on through the night I left them and returned to the Pullman car. I wanted to inspect the door and walls for possible bloodstains, remembering how I'd had to balance myself with one hand while walking.

But there were no spots of blood.

Did that mean a killer who could keep his balance—someone like the conductor O'Brian who was used to swaying trains?

Or merely one with clean hands?

"Conway Falls," O'Brian called into the Pullman. "Coming into Conway Falls! Next stop Boughville."

"There's no one here but me," I reminded him. "The Pullman is empty."

He shrugged. "Routine."

I nodded and glanced at my pocket watch. It was already after four, and we were still a half hour away from Boughville. We'd managed to make up some of the lost time but we were still runnin' late.

The train had started up again, clickety-clackin' along the tracks, when suddenly I heard a scream from the platform between the cars. I dashed from the Pullman, recognizing that it must be Dora Winter in some sort of trouble, and found her strugglin' in Apple's arms.

"What's all this?" I asked. "Let her go!"

He turned on me with a fury. "Mind your own business, Doc! This doesn't concern you!"

Though he was some inches taller than me, I figured I could take him on. Fellas my age always figure that. I aimed a blow at his jaw which he easily dodged, and before I could recover my footing on the swaying platform he countered with a blow to my solar plexus which took the wind out of me and sent me toppling off-balance. I caught myself before I fell out the door, and he quickly gave me a hand back up.

"Here, I didn't want to kill you," he said, his voice reflecting concern. He was obviously a man of moods.

"I'm okay, Apple."

He glanced at the girl and then back to me. Uncertain, he finally turned and entered the Pullman car without another word.

"Thank you," she said, brushing herself off and straightening her dress.

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"Was he tryin' to attack you?"

She hesitated, then nodded. "He wanted me to go with him when we leave the train at Boughville."

"Don't worry, I'll stay with you to make sure you're not bothered." Silently I hoped I'd be more effective the next time.

When the train pulled into Boughville there was no sign of Apple, and I wondered if he'd decided to stay on till the following stop. Sheriff Putnam was there, though, checking those who were leaving the train. "Just an added precaution," he explained, "in case my men missed anything in their search."

I opened my medical bag and Dora Winter opened her case of paints. He grunted and waved us on. Jasper Parsons appeared on the platform next, carryin' his suitcase. "Are you leavin' me, Hawthorne?"

"There's nothing more I can do," I told him.

Apple got off the train then too, accompanied by the Irish conductor. I noticed that O'Brian was countin' out the Pullman tickets, licking his finger at each one.

Countin'.

At my side Dora said something, but I didn't hear it. My mind was somewhere else.

Was it all as simple as that? Could it be? Could it really?

"The sun's just rising," Dora Winter said, pointing toward the glow in the eastern sky. "Maybe I can do some painting after all. Will you walk with me a bit?"

"Sure," I told her. It would be two hours before I could see my first patient. "Just a minute and I'll be with you." I took a prescription blank from my bag and scribbled a brief message for Sheriff Putnam.

"What's this?" he asked when I handed it to him.

"Just an idea I had. It might help you with the case."

O'Brian had hopped back aboard the train and signaled up to the engineer. In a moment the iron horse was pulling out of the station, leaving Apple and the lawyer standing with us on the platform. "How come you got off here?" Sheriff Putnam asked Jasper Parsons. "Weren't you goin' on to Boston?"

"Not without that jewelry I'm not! It was in my care—I'm responsible for it."

Apple gave another glance in Dora's direction and then moved off by himself. "Come on," I said to her. "Let's go catch your sunrise."

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"Will you be back?" Parsons called after me.

"Sometime."

Dora was loaded down with her paint case and easel, so I shifted the medical bag to my left hand and took the case from her. We had strolled through the first morning light toward a point overlooking a quiet country pond. It was out of sight of the station, and in that moment we might have been the only people for miles around.

"Do you make this trip often?" she asked, setting up her easel so that it faced the eastern sky.

"I'm just covering for a colleague. How about you?"

She squeezed a bit of oil paint from its tube. The red of it reminded me of blood. "No, I don't come often. Not in the middle of the night, at least."

"What did Apple want with you?"

"The usual things."

"What made him think you'd cooperate?"

"I have no idea."

I decided it was time for a wild guess. "Was it because he'd seen you sometime with Schmidt?"

Her hand froze in midair, holding the red-dipped brush. "What do you mean?"

"Like so many mysteries, this one revolved around *who* rather than *how*. It baffled us because we didn't see that crucial point. We concentrated on the *how* and ignored the *who*, and that's why we couldn't solve it. The question—the pivotal question—was not how the murderer escaped, but rather who opened the safe and stole the jewelry. If we answer that question, the rest becomes obvious."

"And you know the answer?" she asked carefully.

I gazed toward the east, through the trees, shielding my eyes against the rising sun. "Forget Schmidt's death for a moment and you have the answer. He was alone in a locked caboose, one of the only two people on the train who knew the safe's combination. The safe was opened and the jewelry stolen. You see the answer now? Schmidt—and only Schmidt—could have stolen that jewelry!"

She made a mark on the virgin canvas, a slash of red that was much too deep for the color of the sky I saw. "Then who killed him? And what happened to the knife—and the jewelry?"

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"He had an accomplice, of course. He told us he was going to bed but when we found him dead he was still wearin' his uniform. So he was expectin' someone—not a random passenger who wouldn't have known the jewelry was aboard in the first place, but someone he'd told about it in advance, right after Parsons notified the railroad and requested the safe."

"You asked me if Apple had ever seen Schmidt and me together."

"Yes—because you were the accomplice, weren't you? Once we see Schmidt as the thief, passing the jewelry to an accomplice, the problem of the locked caboose becomes clear. He removed the jewelry from the safe an' passed it out the little paymaster's window to the accomplice waiting between the cars. I don't know what phony story the two of you planned, but he never got a chance to tell it. Because you decided to keep the jewelry all for yourself.

"You stabbed him in the chest through that same little window. He staggered backward, leavin' only a drop or two of blood near the door, and collapsed near the safe. Then you simply pulled the little window closed until the spring lock snapped. It wasn't a matter of the killer escaping from the caboose *because the killer was never inside the caboose!*"

"You think I did that?"

I nodded. "Schmidt named you in his dying message."

"Named me? *Elf*?"

"It came to me when I saw O'Brian countin' tickets just now. Countin'! As an accomplice to a robbery you wouldn't have traveled under your real name. Schmidt didn't know the name you were using, so he couldn't identify you in the usual way—by name. But he did the next best thing: he scrawled the number of your berth—*elf* the German word for eleven. Not the figure 11, which could be mistaken for mere bloody lines, but the word itself. *Elf*—meanin' number eleven, berth eleven. Your berth on the train."

Her eyes were hard now. "And the jewelry?"

"You've been using the wrong color on that canvas ever since you started. Much too dark a red! Maybe because all these tubes of oil paint don't contain what they say?"

I picked up a couple and squeezed them, feeling the hardness inside. "Empty paint tubes, opened from the bottom and then closed again. A clever hiding place, and one the sheriff's men

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never found. The cases and the larger jewelry pieces had to be thrown off the train, of course—but most of it's right here in your tubes of paint, and the larger pieces of jewelry could be retrieved later."

And that was when she lunged at me with the knife.

"No, no, she didn't even scratch me! That note I gave the sheriff told him to follow me and be ready to arrest her. He was ready, all right—grabbed her before she could do any harm. But I'll admit it gave me a bit of a fright.

"Got to be goin' now? And I was just gettin' warmed up! Come by tomorrow night for a small—ah—libation and I'll tell you about Northmont's big kidnapin'—as impossible a mystery as I ever came across. I always call it the Problem of the Little Red Schoolhouse."

"Q"

DETECTIVERSE

WHAT THE DOCTOR ORDERED

by MARK GRENIER

"I'm prescribin' arrest," Dr. Hawthorne began,
"Your career as a killer is through.
As a general rule I'm a tolerant man,
But I'm losin' my patients with you."

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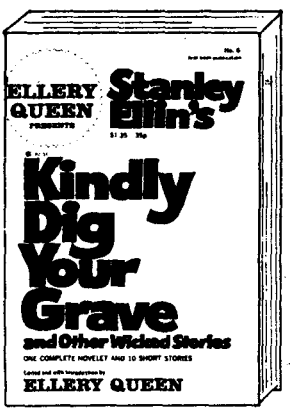

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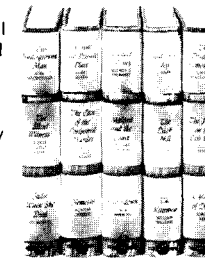

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